

Also by
PAMELA FRANKAU

NO NEWS
THE DEVIL WE KNOW
A DEMOCRAT DIES
SHAKEN IN THE WIND
THE WILLOW CABIN

THE OFFSHORE LIGHT

A Novel

BY

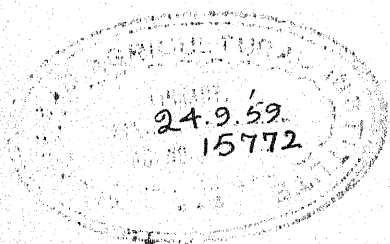
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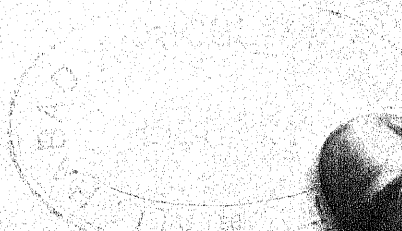
FIRST PUBLISHED 1952

F
F8570



PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE WINDMILL PRESS
KINGSWOOD, SURREY

To
R. A. B.

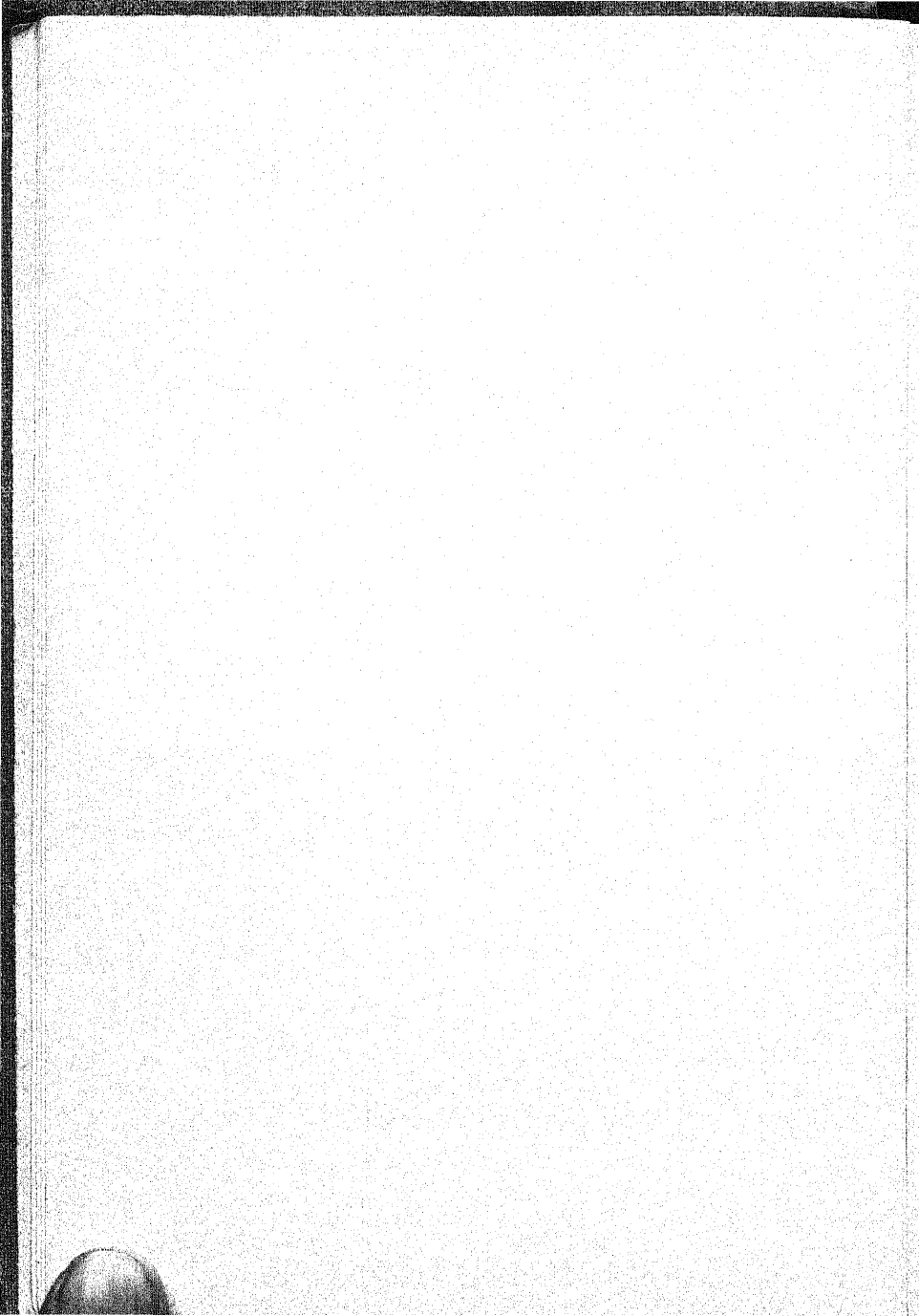


“ . . . know ye not that the friendship of
the world is enmity with God?”

(James, chapter IV, verse 4)

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I

At Orly there were more press photographers waiting and Brooke posed for them beside the aircraft. Howard kept out of the picture. Harriette would be angry if she knew this; Harriette would like to see him in the photograph, standing next to Brooke, smiling determinedly and pulling in his stomach. His mind wrote Harriette's caption: "Brooke Alder flies South after the Paris Conference for a short vacation on the Riviera. He will be the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Howard Rey."

After yesterday, he knew that the message of the captions would be vague. It was even possible that the photographs would not appear at all. Nothing, Howard thought, would surprise him after yesterday. As he followed Brooke up the steps into the private machine, he wondered whether some vast international plan lay behind the thing that was happening now. From Brooke this morning there came so palpable an atmosphere of gay authority, of gentleness; the atmosphere of a great man and the effect, above all, of a healthy man.

"Comforts of home," Brooke said, looking about him; he was as simply diverted as though he had never travelled in a private aircraft before: "the way to fly; if you like flying."

"Don't you like it?"

"My dear Howard, two of the things that I like least in this world are noise and speed." He was laughing; he would have to laugh; he must spend a third of his life in the air.

"You don't feel the speed," Howard argued.

"Ah, but I know it's there," said Brooke, taking off his overcoat before he sprawled and fastened his seat-belt. He had no hat. He wore a tweed jacket and grey flannels, a bright blue shirt with a soft collar. His tailor was still a

British tailor and his clothes still had the casually expensive look that Howard remembered.

The Ambassador had said that he was tired to the point of exhaustion. That body, Howard thought, was tough and well-kept, not used to being tired. Brooke was broad-shouldered, long-legged, solidly muscular. The head, the famous head, might well be tired inside.

Howard studied the head. For him, it had two aspects of familiarity: the Then in youth, the Now in newspaper photograph and caricature. Brooke at forty-five was not greatly different from Brooke at college. There were the same contradictions in the face. The line between the brows was deeper now, but it had been there always; the cleft of a continued frown, thoughtful, not angry. The eyebrows themselves arched neatly; the eyes were bright blue and deeply set; the nose straight, the smile wide and sensual; the smile of the gay boy Brooke had never allowed himself to be. "Your friend with the handsome, mixed-up face," Howard heard across the years; it was said in a woman's voice and he remembered the woman.

He saw that Brooke's dark hair was greyer than the photographs made it. This reminded him of the look of his own hair, blond once, now anonymously buff. He had not worn as well as Brooke, he thought; he was fat around the middle and little broken veins had made his fair skin purplish. "Would you know, looking at us, that I've done nothing and he's done everything? You would."

Before the pilot gunned the engine, Brooke had unfolded the newspapers, glancing at each front page and then tossing the paper aside. The headlines announced the end of the Paris Conference. (Not a complete failure, they said; the door is still open for negotiation). How does it feel, Howard wondered, to be Brooke Alder, reading the lines, reading your own name there? How does it feel to be right in the middle of the world-cauldron and know just how hot those flames are? The quiet profile gave him no clue.

Now the aircraft throbbed and shook; they taxied and stood still, the engines roaring over. Brooke grinned at him, made a gesture as though he would turn off the noise. He went on looking ruefully amused until they moved again; then he lay back, watching the straight line of the runway against the window until it slanted and went. They were in the air.

"Nice take-off," said Howard.

Brooke said, "So we got away." He stared at Howard, with a fixed look in his eyes and the cleft deepening between the brows, the smile still there. "I thought we wouldn't, you know." For a moment his expression was content; then the smile faded. Howard saw the colour leave his face and the face change in three startling seconds from health to sickness.

"Are you all right?" Howard snapped, leaning across to put a hand on his arm.

"Headache," Brooke said drowsily.

"Anything I can get you?"

"No." The voice was placid. "I'll sleep, I guess." He had shut his eyes; he pressed the button that made his chair slope backwards. "Funny," he said; rubbing the palm of one hand upwards across his forehead, holding it there. "It hasn't been quite like this before." He smiled again. "No, it never has. Why, d'you think?" He seemed to be talking to himself. "Suppose," he said, "it was the Regime itself that had to go on trial; what about that?"

"The Regime?" Howard repeated, not knowing which regime Brooke meant, not knowing if Brooke expected an answer. He was still badly frightened by the change in the face.

Brooke sighed once, muttered something inaudible and then Howard saw sleep hit him; he went out as though he had been given an anæsthetic. The lines smoothed off the forehead; the colour returned. In a moment he looked entirely peaceful; a large sleeping man who had no cares.

Exhaustion, the Ambassador had said, not illness.

Howard reflected upon the smoothness of the machinery that could be set in motion because Brooke Alder was exhausted. He did not yet see why he himself was involved in the machinery; he was humble enough to find it highly astonishing. His friendship with Brooke was real; once, more than twenty years ago, it had been a close friendship; once and not again. Howard saw it as a thread loosened by time and circumstance and geography, loosened but never cut. Brooke had made a sudden pull on this loosened thread, an unexpected pull, two days ago.

When he flew to Paris, he had not expected to see Brooke at all. The Conference was raging; the telephone call that he had made to the Embassy was a promise to Harriette. ("If you don't call Brooke Alder, I'll never forgive you. Say to him? Why, say Hello and my love and tell him I've still got that darn' pair of gloves he left in the car; ask him why he doesn't come for a week-end as soon as he's finished with the crisis.") It was merely Harriette's personal build-up in normal operation; Howard had no intention of giving the detailed message. But last night on the telephone Harriette was still convinced that she had made it all happen.

"When I'm patient," he thought, "I'm pompous." And her excitement had called for his patience, so he had talked pompously. "The Ambassador's prescription for Brooke is absolute quiet. No people; no parties. Brooke himself says he just wants to lie around. The Ambassador, yes, darling, I just left him; yes, of course he asked after you. Says he can trust us to cosset Brooke."

"We certainly will. Give him lots of love and say I'm thrilled to bits and I'll be at the airport with the car. No, darling; of course I won't tell anybody he's coming."

She would do it all excellently; she would do a little too much about everything, as usual. How would she keep the crowd away? There was always the crowd, even between the Riviera seasons as now. The month of March did not send Tatiana into hiding; nor the Baroness; nor Lucas nor

the willowy chums of Lucas; nor any one of the faithfully international remnant, the post-war survivors. The farmhouse that Howard had rebuilt and modernised on Harriette's money stood ten miles inland from Cannes; it was an admitted rendezvous for the crowd; because Harriette liked it to be. "Well, for the next week, it mustn't be; it must be a cloister. But why us? Why does he want to come to us?"

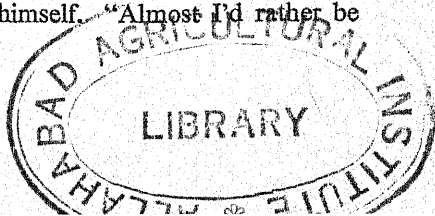
He saw the two of them as they were. He who had meant to be the finest architect in the world; now a comfortable nonentity, comfortable with one building job a year and with Harriette's income. She, who made every day busy with telephone-calls and plans and people. They told each other sometimes that their world had died with the war. But they were of the sort who could remake their world, as long as the taxes let them and the precarious peace held out.

What possible attraction could their world have for Brooke Alder? He puzzled over it, looking again at the quiet face, making a running commentary on Brooke in his mind:

"I'll always see him as a foreigner; because that's how I saw him first; the boy who'd had his youth in Europe, school in England, vacations in France; the European determinedly playing the American. He was poor, too." (That was at Yale. He, Howard, had been the rich man's son. Brooke was gifted, odd, never fitting the background. He had belonged to the same Club as Howard, to the right Club. But he had been always a fish out of water.) "And we all knew he'd do something spectacular. And when he went West and struck oil, we thought he'd done it, that he'd just be Brooke Alder the millionaire.

"And from there on in, the long steps; the gentleman's steps into world-affairs; via F.D.R. and world crisis and war. Still rising like a rocket with Truman; until now. But—European Adviser in the atomic age—Hell, I wouldn't pick it," Howard said to himself. "Almost I'd rather be

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me. No, I wouldn't; that's one of those comforting lies." He grinned at memories—"You told yourself that lie once before, you know. Over Ines."

It was Ines who had spoken of "your friend with the handsome, mixed-up face". That had been the beginning of Ines and Brooke; not that Howard had seen it at the time. He had seen nothing but the dazzle of his own love. The picture of Ines as she had looked when she said that was still clear: the grave dark beauty of the face, the head in its poise of dedicated courage; it was the sorrowful exquisite image that Ines had made so easily for him because she had made it for everybody. She had told him what she told everybody. "And we all fell for it. It was a line, like any other. I'll never know if she really loved the boy who died, what was his name? I've forgotten even that. Wayne—something; killed flying. Maybe she loved him; a lot of them said it was just a line: the debutante-of-the-year dressed in a new fashion; dressed in mourning. Being quietly brave, quietly wise. Heavens, those phrases; I can still see them. 'Since Wayne I have had solitude. And now, that solitude looks almost like second love. I thought that nothing, nobody would ever come to invade it. And now there is you.'"

Howard grinned again. "Those beautiful letters. For years afterwards when I thought of Ines, I saw her writing some unfortunate guy one of her beautiful letters, and quoting the sonnet." When he was still at the stage of hating her, the sonnet had seemed the most ironical of all the ironies. He had called it her theme-song. Even now, to read,

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments——"

brought Ines back. Four years ago, when last he saw her he had not been able to resist quoting it. She had smiled and said, "Beautiful, isn't it. I have always loved that sonnet," as though she did not remember.

The Ambassador had talked of Ines yesterday. "If Brooke could ever be close to somebody," Henry Dickson had said, "he'd worry me less than he does. But it seems he can't be. I never knew a man so well-loved who was so congenitally alone. I've always thought that wife of his was the only person he cared about."

"I believe she was," Howard had heard himself saying, though now he did not really know.

"What happened to her?" Henry Dickson asked.

"To Ines? I guess she left her boxer—or was he a tap-dancer? She stayed with us some years ago; alone; she didn't talk about him."

"Know why she left Brooke?"

"She left everybody. But she knew how to take it with her. I recall," said Howard, "that Brooke gave her half a million as a reward of no virtue."

"He's hopelessly generous, isn't he? Only rich man I've met who really likes to make it go and make it go fast."

"And there," Howard said to the sleeping face, "you certainly got plenty of help from Ines." He thought about her for a little longer, said to himself as he had said a hundred times, "I was well out of that," and pitied Brooke and puzzled over the marriage as he had done before.

Then he went on in his mind, sorting out his own brief snapshots of Brooke in these last years; snapshots taken in Paris, or London. "Always glad to see me," he thought, "but I haven't been important enough to him, surely, to account for this? There must be dozens of friends he's liked better, known better; people he'd choose to go to now? Why me? Why us?"

The answer to that mystery was with Brooke. But the answer to the other mystery was with Henry Dickson. "And I'm not going to be told what, and nor is anybody else. A couple of transatlantic telephone calls, a private plane and Brooke Alder passes out of the international picture. Some-

thing serious must have happened at the Conference; or right after it. Shall we ever know?"

Brooke stirred, sighed, slept again. He did not wake when the steward brought lunch; Howard ate alone. They were putting on height now for the mountains, flying through cloud. The cabin became filled with watery shadow. A little sleepy himself, Howard found Brooke's last sentence returning to run through his head.

"Supposing it were the Regime itself that had to go on trial; what about that?"

"The regime itself. What regime? Did he mean Democracy, perhaps? He might mean that; it suggests that we're lacking, that we've brought all this mess on ourselves, and there's a certain grim sense in it. It's the sort of line that a man like Brooke would take; he'd blame himself always, before he blamed anybody else; or he used to. On the other hand, he may have had his mind pinned down to one particular problem; to some little foreign Government whose structure he knows by heart—in a country that isn't more than a name to me. Imagine carrying the map of the world around in your head," Howard thought, freshly awed, staring at the head again. In these shadows the slumped figure of Brooke had a leaden quality, like a sprawling statue. "There'll be statues of him one day," Howard thought, "if there's a world left to put up statues."

II

HE opened his eyes, feeling the new movement of the aircraft. The steward said, "Sorry to disturb you; we'll be landing in five minutes." He saw that Brooke was wide-awake, sitting upright with his seat-belt fastened, staring urgently through the window as they winged out over a bright blue sea, looped back above green pine trees and white sand.

Brooke said, "It's twenty years since I was here. Twenty years almost to the day. Good timing." He turned to Howard a face that was radiant. "My God, but you look better," Howard said. "You know, you scared me. Headache gone?"

"Did I have a headache?"

"You certainly did."

"I don't remember. Oh, sure; just as we were taking off. I told you I hated flying."

"If you can sleep like that you've no kick," said Howard. "But you must be hungry. I didn't like to wake you for lunch. We can get a sandwich or something at the buffet here."

"I'm not hungry, thanks. I'm broken to eating at odd hours or not eating at all."

"That doesn't sound like sense in your job."

"It isn't," said Brooke, laughing.

"Well, Harriette will see to it that you eat well—and regularly. And get a real rest."

"Rest?" Brooke said, as though the word were foreign to him. "Who said I'd come for a rest?" Howard stared; he knew that he must not quote the Ambassador. "Um—ah; thought you said you just wanted to lie around."

Brooke grinned and did not answer. The aircraft touched the runway. They stepped out into the brisk wind and the sunshine. The place was always the same, Howard thought; always the wind blowing the sand into your eyes; always the sun striking flashes off the sea, off the tarnished silver shapes of the grounded aircraft. He saw the Tricolour flying, the green pines edging the road, the little garden where they served tea and drinks. The airport had a gaily haphazard look and feel to it. Even after years, it affronted Howard's Americanism; it might be efficient, it was indeed efficient, but they should have the sense to make it look efficient.

His thought was interrupted, first by the sight of Harriette

waving to them from the gate of the little garden; then by the fact of Brooke's handing a fifty-dollar note to the flight-steward. There were no photographers here, no pressmen to record Harriette's finest hour. "She looks so young when she's pleased," Howard thought. From the way that her hair was (as neat as dark wood, shining and delicately carved), from the sugar-almond glow on her skin, he knew that she had spent the morning in expert preparation. But she had been careful not to dress up for Brooke. She wore her short fur jacket over sweater and slacks. Everything that Harriette did from this moment onwards would be studied as a mathematical calculation.

In Brooke's manner towards her he had sometimes noticed an oddity; the manner was courteous because Brooke was a naturally courteous person, but it had seemed to Howard that Brooke was obliged to make an effort, in order to realise that Harriette was there. Now the manner had changed; it had become fatherly and affectionate. He soothed her when she failed in three attempts to start up the yellow Cadillac. Its behaviour was as a rule impeccable. Harriette said so.

"Blame me," said Brooke, "I'm death to machines."

"Might have told me that before the flight," Howard said with a grin.

"Being death to machines doesn't mean that machines are death to him," said Harriette painstakingly; it was the sort of remark that made those who were not listening attentively describe her as a witty woman. When she started the car she said, "Triumph of the machine."

Brooke became silent; the three of them sat together in front and he kept twisting his body to look back, to look inland. "It is the colour that one forgets," he said "and the hill-towns looking as if they were made of bleached bone. Cagnes up there. I remember the most awful picnic at Cagnes. I had a sunburn. Sorry——"

"Why sorry?"

"Obtrusive memories from youth; always boring."

"Oh no," Harriette said. "Really one has all one's best ideas before one is twenty-five."

"You'd include the ideas of a schoolboy on holiday?"

"Perhaps. Why not?"

"Or," said Brooke, narrowing his eyes against the sun, "a man on his honeymoon?"

"Why, sure," said Harriette easily. Howard felt jarred and embarrassed. He tried to turn away his mind from Brooke's last confession; to think of the schoolboy on holiday; he tried to strip from this accustomed stretch of road, this hackneyed pleasure-ground, the developments of the last thirty years and see what had been there when the boy saw it. In his mind, the French Riviera was a cliché; an adult's cliché. For Brooke it still made a true phrase. Or perhaps it made two, but he thought that honeymoon with Ines in the South of France must have the look of a cliché now.

Harriette slowed the car on the Croisette at Cannes, at the place where the monstrous pink Casino abutted on the harbour. Howard saw her straining to see this with Brooke's eyes; the sudden flash of masts and hulls and water; the brittle brown line of the trees on the wide avenue, the old town piled up ahead.

"Tropic side," said Brooke.

"Tropical; yes, isn't it?" said Harriette quickly, "I love the light here. It changes from minute to minute."

She took the sea-road out of Cannes. The Esterel mountain range was pale, a smoky blue frieze painted on the edge of the water. Brooke traced their line in the air with his finger. "Cut out of paper," he said. "God with a pair of scissors, somebody said. Very important."

The road to the Reys' house was the road under the railway line; it went through La Bocca and wound its way inland. Here the mimosa was already yellow on the terraced hills; the furthest mountains were still snow-capped.

"Now you can see the house," said Harriette.

It was impossible for Howard to see how the house looked to a stranger. It made an impact always. Some people loved it on sight and some found it too isolated, too queer. It was built on a slope of hillside, with the river running behind; from here, its façade hung downward like a banner over the deep hollow of the garden below. You could see the angles of the terraces, the straight upper terrace outside the french-windows, the lower terrace that slanted; the flat face of the house was golden, the cypresses black, the tone of the garden as yet more brown than green.

With the winding curves of the road, this view of the house was lost and now they came down to it by the steep track that crossed the river. The noise of the waterfall was loud; the guests who had rooms on this side of the house sometimes complained that it kept them awake.

"The effect of a drawbridge," Brooke said lazily, staring down into the waterfall.

"How I wish it were," said Harriette. "The perfect way to keep people out." Harriette, Howard reflected, had never wanted to keep anybody out. Perhaps she was saying it sincerely, in terms of now, in terms of Brooke.

Immediately after the bridge there was the courtyard. The crowding trees shadowed it, shadowed the whole front of the house; made for melancholy. Harriette led Brooke on under the archway. She liked her visitors to come straight from the courtyard on to the sunlit terrace, to the valley view. Always she treated the view as though she had ordered it; pointing out the position of the hill-town across the valley as though somebody of less taste would have put the hill-town a little too far left or too far right.

Brooke stared obligingly, then turned his back to the parapet and looked up at the house.

"You did a beautiful job, Howard. What was it when you found it?"

"Just an old farm-house."

"Big, though."

"Not originally; six rooms. I put the wing on there. I wanted one big room away from the rest. I thought of it in those days as a work-room." He grinned. Brooke gazed at him sympathetically. "What did it turn into?"

"We call it the river room. And use it for parties. Come and look," said Harriette. "And then I expect you'd like to rest."

"No," Brooke said gently. "I'm not in the least tired."

"You'd better be," said Howard, "or Harriette'll run you all over the house."

"I want him," Harriette said, "to see it first from the door under the archway."

They stood on its threshold; on the upper level. Three steps led down from here to the main body of the room. On their left the long arched windows faced the river. The light that came through those windows was a leafy, aqueous light; the perspective of the long floor ran away into shadow. Harriette's treasures were here: the gilded angel from Venice, the black carved chairs, the French tapestries, the Spanish screens. Too many treasures, Howard thought; merely a distinguished clutter. Without them the room would have the mournful majesty of an old ballroom. He had not planned it to be like that; the room had acquired its own character and the character was not entirely lost. Behind the haphazard museum-pieces there was still the coolness and the feel of waiting; everybody who came in at this door was silent for a few seconds.

Brooke was silent for longer. He lifted his chin and seemed to be chasing a memory. Then he said, "Yes, I like it," with a kind of cloudy emphasis.

He stared about him as they passed through the room; Harriette exercising more than usual restraint with her catalogue of the treasures.

As they came to the far door, Brooke halted and looked back.

"I could write here." He accented the word "here", as though they knew that he wanted a place to write.

"You could indeed," said Harriette. "That little refectory table under the window is very solid. I could have a day-light lamp put there . . . move the screen . . . And of course," she opened the door, "you're away from everything, at the end of this hall. You'd be really quiet."

"Yes," he said absently.

"And cosy; with the electric heater."

"Are we allowed to ask what you're writing?" Howard interrupted.

Brooke glanced at him, his expression at first tolerant, suggesting that Howard ought to know; then speculative; then suddenly conspiratorial, with a flutter of his eyelashes, the hint of a look towards Harriette, conveying unmistakably that there was a secret to be shared and that she was not to share it.

"Well, I have to keep a record," he said, on a note of apology, and turned following Harriette.

They went down the long passage, through the door into the main hall. At the foot of the stairs, Harriette said to Brooke, "Serge is unpacking for you. Howard will take you up and I'll leave you in peace. When you've rested——"

"Dearest Harriette——" the laugh was lazy, the sort of laugh that a lion would have; ("He isn't quite a lion, though, unless there's a black lion with blue eyes," the voice of Ines echoed.)

"Yes?" Harriette was saying to the laugh.

"I did all my resting on the flight. I slept from Orly to Nice. I'd like, if I may, to do some work."

"You would? In the river-room?"

He nodded. "If that's all right with you."

"But of course it is. I'll have the lamp and the heater taken in right away. Time," she glanced at her watch; "it's five now. Cocktails around seven? Dinner at eight?"

"Perfect," said Brooke. "Thank you." He kissed his

hand to her as he went up the stairs. Howard expected him to say more about his writing; it was time now, surely, for an explanation of the secret look, but no explanation came. Howard led him into the green guest-room, where Serge was unpacking, briskly and devotedly. The three servants were well-trained. Only an occasional shrillness at morning betrayed Harriette's method.

"Thanks. See you later," was all that Brooke said. He smiled dismissal as he began to take off his jacket.

III

HOWARD found Harriette in the living-room, whose french-windows opened on to the terrace. The striped awnings made a Neapolitan ice-cream pattern outside each window. This was a room whose comforts and conveniences struck Howard always as too eager and apparent. There was a profusion of cigarette-boxes, ash-trays and lighters; a low table on which all the latest American magazines had arrived at once, accompanied by the English *Tatler* and the Continental newspapers of to-day. In the open fireplace huge logs were stacked; there was a Cape Cod lighter in a polished brass pot.

Looking at the bar, you could find no aperitif, no matter its nationality, missing from the coloured rank. There was an electric mixer and glasses by the dozen, in more shapes and sizes than could conceivably be needed by a party of fifty people each using a different drink.

Contrived, Howard thought; industrious; you could see the sweat standing out on the scheme just as you could, from time to time, see the sweat standing out on Harriette's jokes. The radio-gramophone's cabinet of pickled wood matched the wood that panelled the bar. The yellow line of the dado on the wall matched the line of yellow piping

on the light brown chintz. He came to Harriette, seated on the light brown sofa with the yellow piping; she wore the desperate patience of a child told to sit still.

He kissed the top of her head.

"Tell me all. I can't wait to hear," she said.

"You've had most of it on the telephone. I'm still trying to figure it out."

"I want it from the beginning."

"How does he look to you?"

"He looks—different. Livelier."

"Not a very tired man?" said Howard.

"No. And he's told us three times since the airport that he doesn't want to rest."

"That's one of the things that I can't understand."

"Come on," she said, "from the beginning. Sit here."

"Well, I called and left my name. I didn't expect him to call me back; I'd have thought he wouldn't have time to breathe."

"Brooke's always had time for his old friends."

"No, he hasn't," said Howard firmly. This was one of the cheerful fantasies that Harriette was accustomed to weave about the great. "That sort of person can't have."

"He did this time. Go on. He called you yesterday at the Ritz. What time?"

"Very early. Just before eight. Said hello and how glad he was to hear I was in Paris; how were you? The usual stuff. Then, quite abruptly: could we bear it if he wished himself on us for a week? He just wanted to lie around. He sounded shy about it."

"Crazy," Harriette said.

"I said we'd love it; and then it was only would I pick him up at the Embassy this morning and fly down with him? And thanks a lot. He never talks for long on the telephone."

"Well? Where did the Ambassador come into it?"

"Around midday. I was in the bar with Valentine and

Bob. Wanted urgently at the Embassy at half-past two, the message said."

"I'll bet," Harriette murmured, savouring it, "that those two boys were impressed."

"I didn't tell them."

"No, you wouldn't. Go on. How's Henry Dickson looking?"

"Fine. Just the same. Don't tell Brooke I saw him, will you. That's important."

"Brooke doesn't know?"

"It was the first thing Henry Dickson said. 'Please understand I don't want Brooke to know I've talked to you. He might resent it very much.'"

"And didn't say why?"

"Well, it was obvious why. The Ambassador's been worried about him; apparently a lot of people have been worried. Henry Dickson said it looked to him like the edge of a nervous breakdown; that Brooke couldn't let up; wasn't the sort to let up, that everybody from the President downwards had begged him to take a holiday before the Conference. And he wouldn't. And the last thing Henry Dickson had expected was for him to decide to take one here. He was due back in Washington to-morrow."

"Did he seem relieved?"

"Dickson? Sure; delighted. Said how lovely this place was and how good it would be for Brooke. Then made all the stipulations about quiet; no people; no parties. Tough on you, that."

He saw her thinking devoutly, with her look of a pretty lizard.

"Then he mentioned Merritt Lodge."

Harriette's eyes widened. "Merritt Lodge? You didn't tell me that on the telephone. What about Merritt Lodge?"

"Dickson had remembered that he was living here now. Apparently Dickson used to like Merritt Lodge a lot; thought he had a raw deal—all right, darling, we needn't

argue on that one—said Merritt was still the most brilliant neurologist America had produced and he'd like him to see Brooke."

Harriette said, "You surprise me very much. Does he know Merritt's retired?"

"Oh yes. But he was going to call him this afternoon—have a talk."

"Well, I don't want him up here," said Harriette decidedly. "Everybody knows the story on Merritt Lodge and, however brilliant he may be, he's not the sort of person——"

"—All right, darling."

"And I don't imagine Brooke will have much use for him, either."

"Maybe not."

She looked at him under her narrowed eyelids.

"Why are you defending Merritt?"

"I'm not."

"In your head, you are. Because Henry Dickson said he'd had a raw deal?"

"No. It's just—I don't know, Harriette. It's our old point of difference, isn't it? You, absolutely certain that the majority view's the right one; me, mistrusting it. I don't mean I like Merritt Lodge. When I meet him I find him pretty disagreeable. But that doesn't oblige me to like the way they treated him."

She set her lips; she looked just as she did when he told her that he could not read a Book of the Month Club choice. Then she said lightly:

"Know what? It all sounds phony to me. If somebody as important as Brooke Alder is really on the edge of a nervous breakdown, wouldn't he be taken back to U.S.? Would they let him wander off down here for a week and just tell Merritt Lodge—of all people—to keep an eye on him? Doesn't it sound phony to you?"

"Not phony," said Howard. "But odd."

"Tell you what *I* think," she said and was silent again.

"You aren't telling me."

"This might be a first step to easing him out."

"Easing who out?"

"Brooke. Suppose he made a blunder at the Conference; a serious blunder."

"Why the devil should he?"

"It wouldn't altogether surprise me."

Howard found that he could only splutter.

Harriette nodded slowly for a long time.

"That could be it," she said, "that might well be it."

The only contradiction emphatic enough for Howard was a plural word of one syllable. He said it and apologised. Harriette at once became flutingly detached and knowledgeable.

"Darling . . . Brooke Alder's had a wonderful career; but he isn't quite—the real thing after all, is he?"

"I don't get that," Howard snapped.

"Oh yes, you do. We're all inclined to forget it now; he's gone such a long way. But his father was a nobody. Mr. Alder was just a little lawyer from Duluth, who happened to get a job with an international firm in Paris and married a second-rate French soprano."

"So what?" Howard bellowed. The noisier he became, the more tinkling and persuasive Harriette became. It always went this way.

"Well, when people who—who start from nothing get where Brooke Alder's got, they can't always take it. They push themselves to the top. And then they crack. I believe that they always put a foot wrong in the end. Those buccaneers. And I believe that's what Brooke Alder's done."

"You're crazy," said Howard, "and if you'll forgive me, every word you've said sounds damned snobbish and pretty silly."

She lifted her eyebrows. "Darling, really; just because Brooke belonged to that old Club of yours at Yale—it's

too foolish. It's unhealthy, this thing that American men have about college; it's infantilism——"

She glanced at the portrait on the wall above the bar, as though it helped to prove her point. Howard looked at the portrait too; the painting in light oils of a tall golden-headed boy wearing tennis flannels, carrying a racquet, standing on green turf. His mother had commissioned the portrait. In its faithful slickness it had caught him as he used to be; now it was a pin-up façade of his youth. It glowed and smiled above the coloured rank of bottles, and people said things about it after they had had two drinks. Lucas had said, "It's like a poem written in the 1914 War by somebody thinking about his school chapel just before he got killed."

"Brilliant," Harriette had said afterwards: "Lucas can be brilliant when he likes."

Coming slowly down from anger to tolerant resignation, Howard thought, "Her consistency is remarkable. She's got to have her own slant on Brooke, just because she's got to have her own slant on everything. She can never be confronted by a mystery without electing herself the only person who knows the answer. So she makes up this nonsense and then she feels fine."

"You aren't as fond of Brooke as all that, now are you?" she persisted. "Admit it. It's just a Yale jag of yours. You haven't seen him for more than a few minutes at a time in years."

"I'm very fond of him," Howard said tonelessly. "I always have been."

"Except when he took your girl." Harriette had never been jealous of Ines. Now she looked mischievous. "What would he say, do you think, if he knew she'd stayed here?"

Howard said, "Why should he care?"

"Well, he won't. Because we needn't tell him."

"Sure, we'll tell him."

"Why?"

"I'll feel badly if I don't," said Howard.

"Oh God," said Harriette. "More Yale." She rose from the sofa. "I'd better make sure he's got everything he wants in the river-room."

"If he hasn't, he'll ring. I told him to."

"What's this writing? This record?"

"I don't know. Notes on the Conference, I guess."

"Did he bring a typewriter? No, well, Serge had better take mine in to him; I hadn't thought of that." She hurried away. Howard went to his little room at the back of the main hall; he looked over the plans of the villa that he was building at Anthéor; he put through an unnecessary telephone call, made notes of the business discussed with the villa's owner in Paris and tried to feel as though he were working.

IV

At seven, having changed, he came down to the living-room. It had its evening look; the fire ablaze, the lights up on the terrace outside. Harriette, studiously beautiful in red, was mixing drinks. At a quarter past seven, she said, "Go and ferret him out. He must be tired by now."

"All right," Howard said reluctantly.

He was certain that Brooke Alder was used to doing as he liked, but he did not want another argument with Harriette. He went down the long hall, knocked on the river-room door. He waited a moment. Then Brooke came to the door and opened it.

"Hello. Come in." His attitude and gesture were those of a host rather than a guest. Howard did not resent this; he noticed it and unconsciously approved it, feeling that Brooke belonged here. The room stretched away in shadow behind the little tent of white light thrown outward



by the strong lamp on the table and the redly glowing circle of the electric heater; this red circle reflected on the polished floor. The noise of the river was loud. Brooke strolled into the lighted territory, and bent above the table, putting sheets of foolscap into order. Locks of hair fell over his forehead and he pushed them back. When he straightened himself his head and face were in shadow. Still he did not speak; nor did Howard feel any weight of silence.

"At last," Brooke said absently. "It's been a long time."

"What has been a long time?"

"The chance to get back."

"Get back here?"

Brooke laughed. "No, I didn't mean here. I'm sorry; I was thinking aloud."

"Want a drink?"

"Soon," said Brooke, not moving. "That piano of yours has a good tone."

"I thought I heard you playing when I was up in my room. Bach, wasn't it?"

"No."

"Well, one of those boys. Handel? Haydn? I make a lot of mistakes about music," Howard said. "But they're my favourite bunch. Which was it?"

"It wasn't any of them. It was an island tune," said Brooke. He came out of the shadow. "All right, shall we move towards the drink?"

"There's just one thing," Howard said, shelving his question about the island tune. "I sort of have to tell you and I don't know why I do. Only I'll feel all wrong with myself if I don't tell you."

"Go on."

"You may not care. It's just that we had Ines staying with us. For a week-end. About four years ago."

"I thought she'd been here," said Brooke.

"Why did you?"

"I don't know; it was a feeling I had; that she'd seen this

house." He smiled at Howard. "You needn't have scruples, you know. But good of you to tell me, all the same. D'you see much of her these days?"

"Good Lord, no. She just showed up in a party one evening when we were over at Monte Carlo. And Harriette invited her. That's the only time I've set eyes on her since . . . hell, I think the last time before that was when I saw you both dining in New York."

"Back from our honeymoon. You looking nobly embarrassed." Brooke's hand touched his shoulder. "And I never said thank you, did I?"

"Thank you?" Howard repeated, bewildered.

"It was the action of a brother," said Brooke. "I mean that, I'm serious. Don't you know what I'm talking about?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I've never forgotten it. It's stayed in my head. And I'll always be grateful. Why do you look so surprised?"

"Because," Howard said, "for years I've thought that you resented it and that you might have gone on resenting it."

The door opened on Brooke's laughter. Harriette in the red dress cried, "I'm sorry; but it's like sending good money after bad. I'd lost you both. Doesn't anybody want a cocktail? Oh, it's pretty in here now. Ghostly rather. Would you like your drink here?"

"No. Yes," Brooke said, "whichever you like."

"In here, then; we never do. Turn up the lights, Howard." She rang the bell. "Typewriter satisfactory?" she said to Brooke.

"Bless you. I don't type and I'm ashamed. But as I've told you, I'm death to machines."

Harriette guided him to the Knole settee; Howard took the arm-chair beside the refectory table. "Want me to type for you?" Harriette was asking. "I'm quick and I'm accurate. One of the things I'm glad I kept up. I took a course at college and I've never regretted it"

"Thanks," said Brooke. He meditated. "Love the sound of that water. What were you saying, sorry?"

"Saying I could do any typing you wanted."

"Thanks. No; that wouldn't do, I'm afraid."

"Well, there's an excellent typist in Cannes; an English girl; works with American Travel."

"Don't worry, please."

Howard, still playing with his own surprise at Brooke's earlier speech, heard the little words go by. Serge brought the drinks. Harriette was saying, "To write would be the most beautiful release in the world; I've always wanted to write. Write all my rages and dreams out of me—or that damn-fool mood I get when everything seems just too funny."

It was her party talk. Howard found it embarrassing. "But Americans have no feeling for words; and I guess I haven't." She said next, "Aren't you glad you were brought up in England?"

Howard's eyes moved away from her eager profile and Brooke's courteous frown. He looked at the table beside his elbow, where Brooke had arranged his foolscap sheets in order. A map lay on the pile of paper.

"The British," Harriette said, "drink in poetry with their mother's milk."

It was the map of an island. There were the compass points in the lower right-hand corner of the page; a delicate drawing of a ship in full sail off the south-west cape. The island was shaped like a broad, slanted oak leaf.

"An island tune," Howard repeated in his mind.

"And when they tell me that the poets of to-day have found something that the old ones never found, my answer is they'd better get on the ball and start losing it."

He could have put out his hand and picked up the map and studied it; he did not like to do this. It was a game that he played now, craning his neck a little, trying to identify the place.

"They are the poets of defeat, wouldn't you say, Brooke? Essentially of defeat."

The paper on which the map was drawn looked old and yellowish. He could read names printed: MAIN HARBOUR; NORTH LANDING. There was a mountain range marked down the centre.

Brooke was saying, "I'm blessed—or cursed—with a good memory. I carry a whole anthology around inside my head."

"I envy you that. What would you say was the greatest line of verse ever written?"

"I wouldn't," said Brooke, laughing.

On the eastern bulge of the leaf, a little way inland, Howard read, "STATION X".

Now Harriette's stream of talk created a false urgency about his need to know the name of the island; he fidgeted and said, "Cold in here, I think," and nobody answered.

"But it's *cold*," Harriette cried a moment later. She looked down the room and shivered. "Howard's great windows. Let's move, shall we?" She went to the door. Brooke opened it for her and stepped back.

"Brooke, one minute; what's this place?" Howard asked, pointing at the map.

Slowly, having watched Harriette go down the hall, Brooke turned from the door. He came back to the table.

"This island. It is an island, isn't it?"

"Yes," Brooke said, staring down at it. When he lifted his head, the expression of his face was infinitely gentle, as though he had to break sad news.

"I just wondered where——"

"It's the island of Leron."

"Oh—yeah." He tried to remember. He did not want to fake, the way that Harriette had been faking about the poetry, but he had not heard of Leron and he supposed that he should know the name.

Brooke picked up the map, seemed about to hand it

to him, then laid it on the table. His finger-tip touched the centre of it, spun it around on the table's surface.

"You know about Leron, don't you?" he said. "I thought you did."

"I guess I ought to."

"Well, of course," said Brooke gently. "It was the only place that was left after the war."

V

MERRITT LODGE awoke and remembered why he felt pleased. At once he set himself to the task of demolishing the source of pleasure in his mind. It was, said Merritt to Merritt, a small thing. It might have been important to him ten years ago; not now.

"Listen, will you?" said Merritt to Merritt. "There's nothing to be gained from this; and if there were, you wouldn't want it. Are we clear on that? Good. Then we can stop preening our feathers because the Ambassador called us from Paris, can't we? We can? Good. We remember that Henry Dickson has always been our friend, do we not? We do? Ah, splendid."

His polite, sculptural mask writhed at its reflection in the shaving mirror. "And if Henry Dickson thinks that we could assist him with our views on the state of Brooke Alder's nervous system, do we care? Do we, we repeat, care?" He drew the long-bladed razor across the lather; he saw the half-soaped mask fastidiously biting upon the last question. There was a smile in the eyes. "So we do care," said Merritt; "very interesting. And quite ridiculous."

When the sneer left the mask, the mask became that of a tranquil Cæsar; wide brow, arched nose, strong mouth and chin. This head was surprisingly set upon a small body; a neatly-made body, compact as a packet of cigarettes. (A

little man. "Who's that little man? I've seen him somewhere." "Clever little man." "Brilliant little man.")

He finished shaving himself, put on a peacock-coloured dressing-gown and combed his hair. He observed, as he had observed before, that he looked less than fifty; he was in fact sixty-two.

He admitted, because the morning ritual included a self-study as accurate as it was ruthless, that his life was devoted entirely to taking care of Merritt Lodge. In retort to the admission, he reminded himself that he had no choice. Gentlemen of sixty with weak hearts must take care of themselves. He measured out the morning's dose of pills and drank them down with a glass of Vichy water. He seated himself in the arm-chair beside the balcony window. It was too chilly yet for breakfast on the balcony.

"Does Brooke Alder (we ask ourselves) remember?"

He shrugged his shoulders at the answer.

The newspaper-headlines were fifteen years back in time. Whether the story still sounded its echoes in Boston, he did not know. He had never gone back to America. He could imagine that there were still the little voices: one voice murmuring, "Merritt Lodge? Wait a minute, didn't he seduce somebody's wife?" and another voice filling in the names (they were spectacular names, hence the size of the headlines): "Yeah, that's right; she was a patient of his and the husband sued him. Got a packet of damages."

They could remember nothing; or everything; they did not matter. It was not the world's judgment that stayed with him; it was his own. Merritt Lodge would never forgive Merritt Lodge.

Not for the thing that he had done; but for the blunder of letting it be found out; for allowing a piece of stupidity to sink a whole career. There was a game that played itself over and over again in his mind at morning; a game whose opening gambit was made of the words "If you had only——"

After that, there was a choice of moves, all visible and easy; all tantalisingly valid still, after fifteen years; the ways by which he could have avoided his destiny.

It had been easy to escape; he had had money. It had been a smooth readjustment after the uprooting; he had had no ties. The expatriate years spent on research had been full enough, rewarding enough; only Merritt knew that they were not enough. His European façade was miraculously deceptive. ("Lucky little man.") Even when the state of his heart sent him into retirement, there were still those who said that he was lucky; he could afford to retire.

Drinking his second cup of tea, Merritt lifted scornful eyebrows. "Recognition? Is that what we would like, by any chance? To be recognised by the great American nation as The Man who Came Back (courtesy of the U.S. Ambassador and the Honourable Brooke Alder)? Do we cherish some golden, nauseating dream wherein the President thanks us personally and we come, august and floodlit, into our kingdom? To die in respected harness? Well, if we do, we deserve exactly what we get. Which will, in all probability, be Brooke Alder's polite refusal to make an appointment."

He glanced at his watch. The time was nine o'clock. He went to the telephone.

VI

HARRIETTE REY had, in her own view, suffered from insomnia for years. She rang the changes on a series of small cylindrical pills in bright colours. Sometimes the yellow pills were the most effective; sometimes the blue. On this night, the night of Brooke Alder's arrival, they failed her. They pushed her down a little way below the surface of drowsiness and left her there. The luminous

clock registered its inconsiderate figures; the light shone steadily on the branches of the plane tree outside her window. It was the light that kept her awake. Only one light would shine there; the light from the green guest-room. At four o'clock it was still shining.

"Perhaps he always sleeps with the light on. If I closed the shutters I shouldn't see it; but I can't breathe, like that; I simply can't breathe." In her drowsy peevishness, she thought that Brooke ought to know this. Then she thought that Howard ought to wake up and do something about everything. Then she wondered if Brooke were ill; at five she did not care if he were dying. At half-past five she got out of bed and fastened the shutters. After that she began to dream long, tiring, social dreams.

As usual, she was called at eight-thirty. When Jeanne brought her orange-juice and coffee, she would have liked to send it away and sleep till noon. But the sunshine slammed into the room; Jeanne had put back the shutters. She sat up obediently. She felt dazed and resentful. This was a moment to be loved. The look of her white room with its luxurious efficiencies; the sunlight and the cold orange-juice; the beginning of another day, full of telephone-calls and plans and people. Harriette despised those who were not at their best in the morning. She had trained Howard until he too believed that he was at his best in the morning. He always came to drink his second cup of coffee with her before he had his bath.

He came now. He looked uncompromisingly healthy and seemed several sizes larger than usual. His "How did you sleep?" was a routine enquiry. "Howard, I literally did not close my eyes. I mean it. I took three pills and then another at half-past two; and it simply wasn't any good. I feel terrible. And I'm awfully worried about Brooke."

"Why?"

"He kept his light on all night."

"Darling, you weren't awake all night."

"Howard Rey, there are times when I could cut your throat."

The telephone rang. Harriette picked it up. "Hello, Tatiana darling . . . yes, I know I said I'd call, I'm sorry. Darling, don't; I feel awful. I literally did not close my eyes all night. No, we can't this evening. We've got people coming; oh dull people, darling. Business friends of Howard's from Paris. No, I don't think so. Look, be sweet and let me call you back later, will you? Yes, promise; 'bye." She said, "God knows we'll have to break Brooke to Tatiana some time, but not today. What are you grinning at?"

"Just everything," said Howard mildly; he took a cigarette from the box on the bedside table. "Your trouble is that you got over-tired and excited yesterday. Take it easy this morning. There's no need to worry about Brooke. He's up and around already; Serge took him his breakfast five minutes ago. See?" He came to stroke her cheek. "You were imagining things."

"I don't know," Harriette said with dignity, "why you treat insomnia as though it were a ghost story. Can you tell me why I should want to say I've not slept when I have, or why I should *invent* Brooke's light being on all night?"

The telephone rang.

"Mrs. Rey?" It was the smooth comfortable voice of Merritt Lodge. "How do you do? I don't want to disturb the great man, but I understand that he'd like to see me."

She hesitated. "He has arrived, I imagine?" Lodge said.

"Yes, he has arrived. But I don't know anything about an appointment with you; was it for today?"

"There's no appointment. And I shall be over at Monte Carlo all day. But I'm coming up your way tomorrow afternoon and I wondered if I should look in. Say at five o'clock?"

"Will you hold on a moment?"

"Is that Lodge?" Howard asked. "Want me to ask Brooke?"

"No, darling, I'll ask him." Her face was washed and made-up; she always ministered to it as soon as she had brushed her teeth. Now she whisked herself into her white satin robe, fired the scent-spray like a revolver at each ear and went along the hall. She knocked at Brooke's door.

"Good-morning," he said, smiling at her across the breakfast tray. His pillows were piled high. He wore blue silk pyjamas; he looked vivid and untroubled. Harriette, who said often that he had Interesting Looks, now found him beautiful. Perhaps this was the result of seeing him bare-throated, the whole line of the neck, usually interrupted by collar and tie.

"Good-morning, Brooke. Forgive me for rushing in on your breakfast, but Merritt Lodge is calling. Would you care to see him tomorrow around five? Here? He could stop by."

Brooke murmured, "I should of course be delighted. But who is Merritt Lodge?"

"I think," she said, embarrassed, "that he's a friend of Henry Dickson's."

"Oh, yes; I know now. The neurologist with a past. All right," Brooke said, "tell him that'll do."

"How did you sleep?"

Still smiling, he shook his head. "I haven't begun yet."

"Oh, Brooke. I thought I saw your light. I'm so sorry."

"Please. I often work all night and sleep all day."

"You were working?"

He said, "M'm. There's a great deal going on, you see."

"Yes, of course. But—you're here to rest."

"I'll rest now. I want that typist, though. Can she come and collect what I've written?"

"Yes, I'm sure she can. Or could I type it?"

"No," said Brooke, his voice now firmly authoritative.

"If it's something confidential——"

He looked amused. "I'll trust the typist. Can you get

her? All right. I needn't see her, I've given the envelope to Serge. Tell her to take it away and get it done quickly. Thank you." He kissed his hand to her. It was a gesture of dismissal. Back in the bedroom she said to Howard, "I find him a little autocratic."

"So does Merritt Lodge by now, I imagine."

"Oh my God. Are you still there, Dr. Lodge? I'm so sorry. Mr. Alder will see you here to-morrow at five. Good-bye. The chip on that man's shoulder is *audible*. If I were Brooke I wouldn't see him at all. Now, Millie Bolton. Ought she to type something like this?"

"Like what?"

"This record; these notes. For your information, he has been at them all night. He hasn't slept a wink. He's going to sleep now."

"Okay, darling; you win."

"But *ought* he to give his confidential notes to Millie? He says he'll trust her."

"Then that's all right, isn't it?"

"I don't know that it is."

"Cheer up, darling," said Howard. "Maybe he'll let you type the next lot."

"I find you vastly unattractive this morning."

"That puts Brooke, Merritt Lodge and myself in the same dog-house. A distinguished dog-house. Get some sleep."

"I'll have to call Millie Bolton first."

Millie Bolton's breathy little voice sounded pleased. She would come up and fetch the manuscript in her lunch-hour.

"I could take it down later," Howard said. "Drop it in at the American Travel Office. I pass the door."

"No, darling. Millie likes to get out. I'll give her a sandwich here. Now if you'll just draw the curtains, *not* the shutters. Oh, and ask Serge to give you the envelope Brooke gave him. Put it on the table here."

"Going to read yourself to sleep with it?"

"If that's a joke," she said, "you'll have to do the laughing."

After he had gone she opened her eyes. The manuscript was enclosed in a Manila envelope. It was heavy and bulky. The envelope was sealed.

It seemed to Harriette that she had slept for only a few minutes before the soft knock and the delicate, feathering footsteps projected Millie Bolton into the room. "Oh, Mrs. Rey . . . Did I wake you? They told me to come straight up."

"Yes, quite right. Draw the curtains, there's a dear. I'm not as lazy as I look; I literally did not close my eyes all night. I've asked them to send us up some lunch." The sunshine clashed into the room again. "But I do feel better," Harriette thought; she looked about her at the things that she liked; yes, it was a second chance at the authentic mood of the morning. She made Millie give her the hand mirror, powder-puff and lipstick. Millie was always Poor Millie in her mind. She was an Englishwoman, unmarried; somewhere in the thirties. She had good eyes, a bad skin, hair like hay and a smile of unequivocal sweetness. She wore, as ever, a hopsack suit with a pale blue blouse. Millie lived in a one-roomed flat looking on a back street of Cannes; she said often that she valued her independence. At Harriette's invitation she sat down, choosing the only uncomfortable chair in the bedroom.

"Here it is, Millie. Perhaps you'd better open it, see if you can read the handwriting."

"Your writing's ever so easy to read."

"This isn't mine."

"Oh?" Millie waited to be told whose it was.

"I'm afraid," said Harriette, "that I have to be a little mysterious about it. All I can tell you is that it's a report; notes, important notes. And it's wanted quite quickly."

"Well," Millie said, "if we're slack this afternoon I can get it started in the office."

"No, my dear, don't do that. It's confidential; nobody should see it but you."

"Then I'll start it as soon as I get home." Harriette watched the reddish, humble hand opening the envelope. She could see that there was a considerable script there; written on the same foolscap paper that Brooke had been using in the river-room. The pages looked neat; Millie feathered through them.

"About ten thousand words there, I should say."

"As much as that?" Could anybody, even Brooke Alder, write ten thousand words in a night? It sounded impossible.

"But I've never seen such beautiful handwriting; it's as clear as print. And of course it's a final draft. No corrections, no crossing out." She put it together neatly and returned it to the envelope. "Tomorrow's Saturday. I can probably finish it in the afternoon if I get far enough to-night." She looked a little wistful, as though she expected Harriette to tell her that she need not work at it on her free afternoon.

"It is very urgent, Millie. I know that."

"Righty ho," said Millie excruciatingly.

"And now, while we have our lunch, tell me what's been happening to you."

"Nothing," Millie said with her sudden endearing smile, "ever happens to me."

VII

THE villa at Anthéor was half-way to completion. Howard had little to do here, but he came every day to watch the workmen. He had hoped that Brooke Alder would come with him this afternoon. He wanted Brooke to see his work; to understand the subtleties in the design, the features that would distinguish the small house on its pointed peninsula and make it belong to its landscape of rock and pine.

They were the same subtleties that he had put into every plan since he had worked on this coast. They were no longer original nor surprising, but he had become as faithful to them as a poet disciplined to the rules of prosody. He liked his own convention.

And he liked this stretch of the lower Corniche. It had for him a quality of lonely magic that the coast of pleasure lacked; it was quiet; and it was honoured, he felt, by war. The armies had come ashore on these beaches; an iron wreck still rusted here, its angry shape held fast in the bright shallows. Naval guns had blasted the villa on whose site he built.

Not a factor that should contribute towards peace of mind, yet here alone, watching the house grow, he could catch up with a peace of mind mysteriously absent at other times and in other places.

He tramped around the scaffolding, then crossed the gravel hump of the peninsula, leaned on the broken balustrade and lit his pipe. The horizon was sunny; the sea beginning to ruffle with the wind from the east.

"So that's how it was," Howard said to himself, "and I've been wrong all these years. 'The action of a brother,' Brooke said." He looked back.

He saw the doorway of the bar on 52nd Street and himself walking in; young Howard Rey, the lucky boy whose luck had run out with his father's money in '29; a young man with good clothes and a grievance; his architect's training cut short; doomed to an office job with a firm of commercial builders; still haunting, on occasion, scenes of his past fun; still recognised by waiters and barmen.

It was too early for a drink and he knew it; but he knew no other short cut away from the heat and his own gloom.

He saw, as he came into the shadowy, air-cooled place, that there was a woman sitting at one of the sofa tables. When he had settled himself, exchanged the usual greeting with the waiter and ordered his drink, he looked at her

again. She was watching him gravely. He resented the bounce of his heart against his ribs.

"Hello, Ines."

"Hello, Howard."

"Waiting for somebody?"

"No," she said with the smile that made the grave beauty different, suddenly animal and alive. "I'm not waiting for anybody. I was hot and I wanted to think."

"I won't interrupt you."

"You may. Please do. I've thought."

He moved over beside her. Her atmosphere was the same: de luxe, controlled, quiet. Nobody ever sat as still as Ines sat, nor seemed as much at ease with melancholy. Her hands were linked upon her knee; he looked at the left hand.

"That must be the largest diamond outside of Cartier's window," he said.

"A little crudely put: yes, I imagine it is."

"Are you going to be married?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"On Thursday. That is what I was thinking about."

"Wondering if you'd go through with it, I suppose."

"No."

"Good," he said coldly.

"Howard, you can't have been in the same mood for two years, can you? Or can you? You must be tired of it."

"Never mind about me. Tell about you."

"Well, I haven't been in a mood at all; I've been in California."

"What with my being crude and your being cute," he said, "we don't look like getting far."

"No," said Ines, gazing in front of her at the opposite wall, "but that is very natural and next time we meet we shall be comfortable and polite. This sort of impact, after——"

"Darling, please remember that the days when you had to teach me lessons about love are over. Who's the current pupil?"

"The current pupil?"

"Well, I guess he's graduated. I mean the man you're going to marry on Thursday."

Now she looked vulnerable and secretive. "Oh, Brooke Alder," she said at last, in the manner of an actress throwing away a line.

"You don't mean that, do you?" Howard asked after a moment.

"I do, yes."

"Honestly?"

"Honestly."

"God's truth," Howard said very quietly. He put his empty glass on the table. "Did that happen in California?"

"Some of it."

Still he did not believe her. It was too neat; it was contrived as the plot of a movie. He had not yet assimilated the idea that Brooke was rich while he himself was poor. When he thought of Brooke, he still thought of his odd, solitary friend at Yale; of the dreamer with the debts; a person destined, he had believed, for some difficult, eventual glory, but not for the smoothly astounding fate of turning millionaire overnight. "Last man I ever expected to hit a jackpot," had been his comment and his mind was still making it. And now he was asked to swallow the information that the jackpot included Ines. He began to laugh.

"What is funny?" she asked gently.

"If it's true, it's funny."

She never lost her temper; she didn't lose it now. She said, "Why, Howard?" in the same temperate courteous tone.

"You wouldn't understand. Do you swear that's true? You're going to marry Brooke?"

"Yes. We haven't announced it because we both like it

better this way. It will be a quiet wedding and we sail for France the same afternoon."

"To live?"

"No; we shall live here. But Brooke wants France for the honeymoon; to take me to the South and show me the places where he used to go when he was a boy."

("Something catlike about you now; a cat that has swallowed its mouse.") Thinking that, he ceased to be jealous of Brooke; he began to worry. He said abruptly, "D'you love him?"

"I do."

The look of possession was gone. There was the old look; the dedicated look, so faithful to her younger self that he wanted to laugh again. In a moment, he thought, she would begin to say softly,

"Oh no! It is an ever-fixed mark

That looks on tempests and is never shaken."

She held the pose, still gazing ahead of her. He thought, "If I didn't know, I guess I could be fooled. But there are too many of us who know, aren't there, Ines? Get four of us together (me, Bobby de Wolff, Marshall Grey, Lawrence Tobin) and we can go straight through your act without getting a word wrong. We did it once last year when we were drunk. All the lies: the invasion of solitude, and Wayne's life going on in yours, and there being no lies in love, and not robbing his memory but enriching it. We died laughing.

"I do see," he thought, "why you had to take the act to California after a time. But what I don't see is Brooke falling for it—wanting to marry it; that's beginning where the rest of us left off. Brooke isn't so innocent, is he?"

After another moment, he thought, "Yes, I believe he is." And he heard himself asking, "Is he in New York?"

She must think it odd that this was his only comment; that he did not congratulate her nor say a pretty phrase.

But she gave no sign. She said, "Not at the moment. He's in Philadelphia. There's only one other Alder and that's an uncle in Philadelphia. Nice, to be marrying somebody with only one relation."

It was a project born on one drink, strengthened on two and made imperative by three. In the taxi, headed for Pennsylvania Station, with the heat and the impeding downtown traffic, he asked himself, "Why are you doing this?" The answer was firm. It was a thing that had to be done.

Now he remembered the station, at its worst; the heat like a dirty wet duster slapped in his face; the weary sweating mob, the long lines at the ticket window. Then there was the club-car; the commuters going home; raucous bonhomie of middle-aged men with money; his own glass filled and his resolution dying on him behind the drinks. It died slowly and surely, from Newark to Trenton, from Trenton to Broad Street. He walked out under the brassy haze of sunset into a city that meant nothing. He went to the Barclay Hotel, because once he had been to a wedding-reception there. This quest for Brooke was impossible; he wasn't going to pursue it. Back in the bar with Ines, it had been an urgent crusade. Now it was silly, impertinent, useless. He looked up Mr. Alder in the telephone-book. The fact that there were three Mr. Alders was somehow stimulating. He got the right house the first time.

"Hello, Howard?" Brooke sounded incredulous. "Where are you?"

"Oh—in the Barclay Hotel. Passing through. Wondered if we could meet."

"Why not indeed? You come here. We've just finished dinner and my Uncle Thomas will take himself to bed in ten minutes."

In the yellow taxi, Howard said to himself, "You don't have to do it; you don't have to say anything."

It was a funny house in which to find the new millionaire;

an old half-bricked house with a wooden porch, on the corner of Fortieth Street and Walnut. There was a coloured lamp over the porch. Brooke, in his shirt-sleeves, was standing under the lamp. He was still odd, Howard saw; he wasn't just a tall black-haired young man whose skin was tanned. He looked monumental, peculiar, out of place and still unself-conscious.

"Hello there," he said softly, "I'm awfully glad to see you."

"You look fine."

"I'm well. Not sure I would be if I had another week in this climate."

"Awful, isn't it?"

"Awful. Tough on us Californians."

"Are you an adopted native son? I guess you might be."

"No. It was all right for a bit."

"Very much all right, I'd say."

Brooke grinned at him.

"How does it feel?" He could not help noticing that the shirt was a silk shirt with a monogram, could not help noticing the cuff-links and the shoes.

"Feel? Well, it was fun," said Brooke, "magnificent fun. Tell you some time. How did you find me?"

"Hunch," said Howard.

"Nonsense."

"Well—tell you sometime."

("Meaning as soon as you tell me.")

Brooke said nothing of Ines yet. He led Howard through the house to a study at the back. It was cool and sombrely comfortable. The windows were open, looking into an overgrown garden. Brooke had pulled two leather arm-chairs up to the windows. "Now, then. How did you know I was here?"

"I saw Ines."

"You did?" He raised his eyebrows. "Then you know."

"Yes, Brooke. I know." He watched the cleft between the eyebrows deepen.

"Well?" Brooke asked quietly.

"Are you happy?"

"What do you think?"

"I asked you."

"I'm happier than I ever was in my life. I've got everything. It doesn't seem fair, does it?" He smiled and shook his head; a black lock of hair fell forward. "Unequal distribution on a big scale. But you know—it frightens me." He paused, looking at Howard, his face suddenly stiffening into anxiety. "You've come to tell me something. What?"

"I sort of have, and I sort of haven't."

Brooke laughed. "Mr. Rey is explicit," he said to the ceiling.

"Mr. Rey'll try to be. Listen—we know each other pretty well, don't we? We've skipped a year; more than a year, but that can't make much difference. After all we're both grown up."

"Oh, undoubtedly grown up," Brooke murmured, pacing to and fro before the bookcases.

"Well—so—we can talk. You said you wouldn't marry, remember?"

"And meant it, at the time, out of my great wisdom. Being cursed with a good verbal memory, I can recall my words. I was advocating marriage on a French pattern; an unemotional contract, signed for the purpose of producing a suitable family. No?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

He saw that Brooke's face was now dazed with laughter. "If you're worried, Howard, I can promise you that's not the type of contract I'm entering into this week."

"No. I didn't imagine it was."

"Well?" Brooke said again.

"You're no ordinary man."

"Thanks. But what, if I may be ordinary, simple, dumb, are you getting at?" He came back to his chair and perched on the arm, drink in hand.

"This," Howard said slowly. "That I think—if you do get married now—you'll be hellish unhappy in a few years' time."

There was a silence.

"I'll have to ask you why you think that."

"At Yale, you said you didn't know what you wanted."

"Correct, I didn't. Think I still don't?"

("He's fencing too; or he'd mention her name. He's being careful not to. He knows what I mean.")

"No. You're too new to good fortune."

"Mustn't be pompous," Brooke said.

"Thought you'd say jealous. And I'm not. It isn't just because I loved her once."

"Quite sure it isn't?"

"Well," Howard fumbled, "if I didn't know Ines, I guess I'd have fewer ideas on the subject."

"You have yet to tell me your ideas."

"I know. I feel it's damned impertinent of me to try and give you advice; but here's the point. You've just begun to crack the world wide open. And I'm glad for you. But I think you've still got a kind of innocence about yourself, and about, well, maybe about women too."

"Put your mind at rest on that worry," said Brooke, "I'm not innocent about women."

"Not that way."

"Then what way?"

"In—in seeing them for what they are."

"Explain," Brooke said in a colder voice.

"You're an outsize person with outsize ideas. Nobody who's stock-size will ever be any real use to you. You can't measure down to stock-size situations."

"What makes you think," the cold voice asked, "that I'm inviting them?"

Howard swallowed. "Ines won't stay your course."

"Mean she'll be bored with me in two years' time?"

"Not bored, necessarily. But just because she's beautiful and articulate doesn't mean that she's got your brains or your stamina. I can see you with two kinds of wife," he said, gaining courage, "either with a placid cow who'll give you children, and house-keep; or with a genuine dynamiter like yourself. Nothing in between would seem to me to be any good."

Brooke nursed one knee and stared into the garden. "After all, it's kindly meant," he said, as though he were talking to himself.

"How long have you known her?"

"You should know. I met her with you, up at Yale."

"For five minutes."

"Yes, for five minutes. And that had to last me nearly three years."

"Are you telling me you fell in love with her then?"

"Certainly."

"M'm," said Howard. "Yes, so did a lot of other people."

"You don't think that's news to me, do you?"

"No."

"Then what do you think? What's the thing that you won't say?"

Howard was silent.

"Ines," said Brooke, "is, I believe, the only person I've ever met who is completely honest, completely truthful."

("I fell for that line too.")

"So you can disgorge your dark secret, whatever it is, and you'll find that I know it already." The voice was still cold; the eyes scornful.

"Oh hell," Howard said. He found that his weariness had caught up with him, that the effect of the drinks was now only a steady dullness inside his head. He stood up. "All I can say is that I beg you not to do it," his own voice

was not cold, it was merely tired and toneless. "I mean that. She'll break you to pieces and she won't stay to pick the pieces up. She doesn't love you, she can't love anybody, she only loves everybody."

"Quiet, will you?" Brooke snapped.

"Wait a minute. It's not her fault. It isn't a game any more; it's like an illness. It runs to a regular pattern."

"Quiet."

"No. I can't keep quiet, you see, because I know. I could quote the things she says to you. I could write all her letters to you, including the last, it's the most beautiful of the lot, the one where she says she can't go on loving you because something—" Brooke had grasped him above the elbows and the last sentence was shaken out of him. "Something-broke-a-long-time-ago-when-Wayne-died."

"You'll have to go now, I'm afraid. I'll get you a taxi. Come along."

"You fool. I came here to tell you just that, don't you see? I had to get myself drunk to do it." He was struggling with Brooke all the way to the door, "I didn't have any business here. I wasn't passing through."

"That's all right, Howard. Come along."

"If you think I'm the only one, ask Marshall, ask Larry."

"Quiet, please. And I'm grateful to you," Brooke said, "for taking so much trouble."

Leaning on the balustrade between the half-built house at Anthéor and the sea, Howard Rey knocked out the ashes from his pipe.

"That's how it was," he said to himself. "The action of a brother. But it didn't look like it at the time."

He strolled towards his car. "Being young was a silly business, all the same. If Ines was a whore, I was a puppy. And there are moments when Brooke still makes me feel a little like a puppy. He did last night. I understand rather less than half of what he talks about. That Greek

island. Leron; I guess it's Greek. And according to Brooke I ought to know."

VIII

WHEN Harriette came out on to the upper terrace at half-past four, Brooke was there. She had thought that he was still asleep upstairs. He waved and came slowly towards her under the plane tree.

"Hello, did you catch up on your sleep?"

"Oh, yes, I always can." He smiled at her, his eyes looked very blue and the whites of the eyes had a bluish tint. "What would you like to do?" she asked him. "Work all finished?"

"No, certainly not. But I can't work yet. It becomes a little difficult now." He paused abruptly.

"Would you like to come for a drive?"

"What were you preparing to do? You look," he said, "as though you were going into elegant places."

"In fact, I usually go to the Casino for an hour around now. But I'd sooner take you driving."

"I'd like to come to the Casino," said Brooke.

"Really?"

"Truly."

"Ought you to?"

"Why not? Afraid I'll get into trouble?"

"I was thinking of the people," she said. "There are always people, and if you go into the rooms you'll have to produce your passport and sign your name."

He was still laughing at her. "I can sign my name, Harriette; it's only when I'm very tired that I make an X instead."

"Oh Brooke, you know what I mean. You came here to be quiet."

"Quiet, not invisible. Besides," he hesitated, "time's very short. I'd like to see as much as I can here."

"Including the Casino?"

"Including the Casino."

"Fine, then. Howard usually stops by there at half-past six to see if I'm ready to leave."

As they walked across the courtyard, she said, "But how short is time? Can't you stay more than a week?"

"I don't know," said Brooke. "I'll find out, but I don't know." His voice and manner were abstracted now. She felt as though he had withdrawn from her behind a glass screen. She said to the screen, "The typist came to get your notes; did Serge tell you? She hopes to finish them tomorrow."

"My notes? Oh, yes, thank you." He did not sound interested.

In the car, his silence lasted so long that it embarrassed her. She said, "Do you like to gamble?" and then felt foolish. Brooke appeared to be thinking out his answer.

"Not really, not now. I used to. It belongs to time past. The people interest me. But the game . . . I have to get myself into a mood where it matters."

"I love it, I'm afraid. Howard doesn't."

"No, he wouldn't," Brooke said affectionately.

"How do you think he looks?"

"Howard? Very well." The tone of his voice was formal.

"Sometimes I worry that he doesn't have enough to do."

"Yes," said Brooke, "I should think you might." It was not the answer that she had expected and she found it offensive, being used to reassuring compliments, that included marriage to herself as a guarantee of happiness. She said at once, "Oh, tell me if I drive too fast, won't you? Howard tells me you dislike speed."

"It's more the theory of speed that I dislike than the practice. If I'm in a car, I like it to go quickly, because that is what it's supposed to do."

"But you'd prefer not to be in a car?"

"Not quite. I'd prefer not to be in a world of cars."

She said brightly, "The old coaching days?"

He did not answer; his silence began to weigh upon her again. She thought, "And I've always said that Brooke Alder was easy to talk to. He's only half here. I guess he's worrying. Well he might. And why he wants to let himself in for the Casino, where he's bound to be recognised—and probably bound to meet people who'll ask him questions—well, it isn't up to me to stop him. Anyway, thank God—after the lie I told Tatiana—that she's over at St. Tropez with Liesel and Lucas. But there'll be somebody. There always is."

They came along the sea-road. The wind now blew strongly from the east; white waves ruffled the sparkling surface; hard white clouds strung out above the islands and hurried over; it was an afternoon of curt brilliance. In the harbour basin the masts were swaying, the boats at anchor jostled and creaked.

"*Stations réservés aux usagers du Casino*," Brooke read aloud as Harriette parked the car. "What an atrocious word for the French to coin. 'Usagers' is the impurest pure American, isn't it?"

She experienced a slight arching of resentment, which came every time that others spoke against America. She allowed herself to be passionately unpatriotic when she wanted to be, herself but nobody else. And she still thought of Brooke as a foreigner, and foreigners shouldn't.

Brooke strolled after her, through the foyer where two jugglers were entertaining a tea-time audience, between the glass show-cases to the glass doors. While he produced his passport and signed his name, he did not appear to notice their effect, nor that people coming out of the doors halted to stare at him. The man who gave him his card bowed and said, "Monsieur Alder, thank you very much."

"Going to play?" Harriette asked him at the caisse.

"I don't know." He took out his wallet and put down some money in the same absent-minded manner. It was a great deal of money for a man who had not made up his mind to play, there were fifty thousand francs and a line of ten-dollar notes.

He waved her benignly towards the *chemin-de-fer* table. "Don't worry about me. I'll just stroll around."

There was no reason why his presence in the rooms should affect her. The game was as a rule proof against outside influences and distractions. Now she found herself glancing back over her shoulder at the brass rail, expecting to see him leaning there, watching her. She did not see him. It was an uneasy session. She passed a bank that ran five times more, she had only to say "Banco" to be met with an eight or a nine from the shoe; somehow this went on being Brooke Alder's fault. Presently she picked up her remaining chips and left the game.

On her way to the bar she saw him standing by a roulette table where there were few players. It was the table whose minimum stake was five hundred francs.

"Hello," he said, "are you the kind of gambler who mustn't be asked how it goes?"

"I'm not, and it doesn't. Howard will be here in a minute. Would you like to give me a glass of champagne?"

"*Vingt-neuf, impair et passe*," said the croupier at the table.

"That would be my number," said Brooke idly. She saw, lying alone on the number twenty-nine, the plaque whose design was like that of a fried egg, the plaque worth five thousand francs. He collected his spectacular dividend, over-tipped the croupiers by a hundred per cent and followed Harriette. They sat down beside the window. "But you're *sure* you don't want to go on playing?" she besought him again.

"No, I promise you. I wasn't really playing. But, just now and again, there is something babyish about it that

appeals to me." He ordered her champagne and a tomato-juice for himself. Two Englishmen were standing at the bar; she saw one, advised by the other, turn quickly to stare.

Brooke played with a white oblong plaque, value fifty thousand, and said musingly, "More fun as a toy like this than as accustomed cash."

"Oh, I can enjoy the accustomed cash as well as the next woman."

She was surprised by his meditative look, by the deepening of the lines on his forehead. She might have said something idiotic. She hurried on, "But I see what you mean. They're gay, aren't they? The *milles* most of all. And they seem such a lot, of course I belong to the days of the five-franc minimum. One could write a gambler's autobiography and call it 'When Milles were Hundreds'."

She knew that she ought to be enjoying herself, sitting here with Brooke Alder; there were people all over Europe and America who would ask nothing better. She was not enjoying herself. His courteous solemnity made her sound silly. She could not stop chattering.

"Absurd to think of it as more, when really it's just the same value as it ever was. I suppose I've got so used to the higher cost of living that I go right on thinking that the cost of gambling has risen too."

"One's expenditure," said Brooke, "is constitutional after all."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you find that you spend the same amount of money wherever you are, whatever you're doing?"

"Why no, I'm sure I don't. Howard and I—if we lived in America, we couldn't afford to live as we do here."

He wore the look of a patient instructor. "That isn't quite what I meant. I was talking about your expenditure, not what you get for it."

"I don't understand."

(The little Austrian woman in the little black satin suit

had recognised him now; she was indicating him excitedly to her fat blonde neighbour.)

Brooke said, "By the time one has grown up, one has determined one's rate of spending. It's part of one's character, and it doesn't vary. It isn't really affected by living rent-free, or by being left a fortune. Doesn't matter how one gets rid of it, one always gets rid of the same amount."

"You mean that an extravagant person will always find opportunities to spend?"

"Yes. And a thrifty person to save. If you think about it, you'll probably find that you always spend the same amount. And you always will."

"Would you call yourself extravagant, Brooke?"

"I suppose so. If I am, I always was, even when I didn't have anything to be extravagant with." He flipped one plaque on another. ("Millionaire's tiddly-winks.")

"It's in the state of mind," he said, "not in the ledger."

"I don't believe," Harriette said, "that I'm either mean or extravagant. I figure I'm reasonable about money."

Brooke laughed gently. "Nobody is, my dear."

"Nobody?"

"Money isn't a thing about which we can be reasonable."

"Why not?"

He looked as though he might yawn. "Because we have exaggerated its importance so enormously."

("Fine talk, rich man's talk.")

"When you say 'we'?" she began.

"I meant the world, the whole world. We've got its meaning out of proportion."

"How, may I ask?" She felt again the arching of resentment, the fussy prelude to taking offence.

"I can give you plenty of illustrations," said Brooke. "Might begin with the little neurologist, what's his name? Merritt Lodge. Take Lodge. And take——" he named the two people concerned. "Well, what could be more

absurd than to sue a man for money because he has abstracted your wife—and get it?”

“But I don’t call it absurd, the Court awarded damages. How else could Merritt Lodge have paid damages?”

“He might have returned the wife. No, seriously, Harriette, you’d call it a sane procedure?”

“I don’t see anything insane about it,” she said, draining her glass.

“You don’t?”

“No. Well, go on. How else do we exaggerate the importance of money?”

“By everything we say and do. Look at the way that it always clinches an argument. ‘After all, I pay, don’t I?’ establishes divine right.”

“Not divine right, just a right.”

“It’s the last word, you’ll agree?”

“It’s reasonable that it should be, surely. After all, if I’m paying for something——”

“—You consider yourself a little more important than the man who’s selling you the thing that you want.”

“That’s the sort of argument I can’t follow. What’s so funny, Brooke?”

“All of it, not your view of it. Money twists its way into every situation. If you want to add the final opprobrium to an adulterer, you’ll say that the wronged husband frequently paid for his meals. Respectability, on the other hand, is emphasised by solvency.”

“Why shouldn’t it be?”

Brooke did not answer. He said, “You’ll remember the man who owes you fifty dollars for longer than you’ll remember the motorist who swerved to avoid running over your dog. Find a quarter on the floor of a taxi, hand it to the driver and you’ll feel as honest as you do when you tell a difficult truth for the sake of integrity.”

Harriette interrupted him: “Those feelings are very human, aren’t they?”

"Oh yes, I didn't say that they weren't."

"Because money has become an essential, well, an essential part of humanity's fabric."

"That," said Brooke, "is precisely what I'm complaining of. Here's Howard."

"Last person I expected to see here," was Howard's greeting. "You look rested."

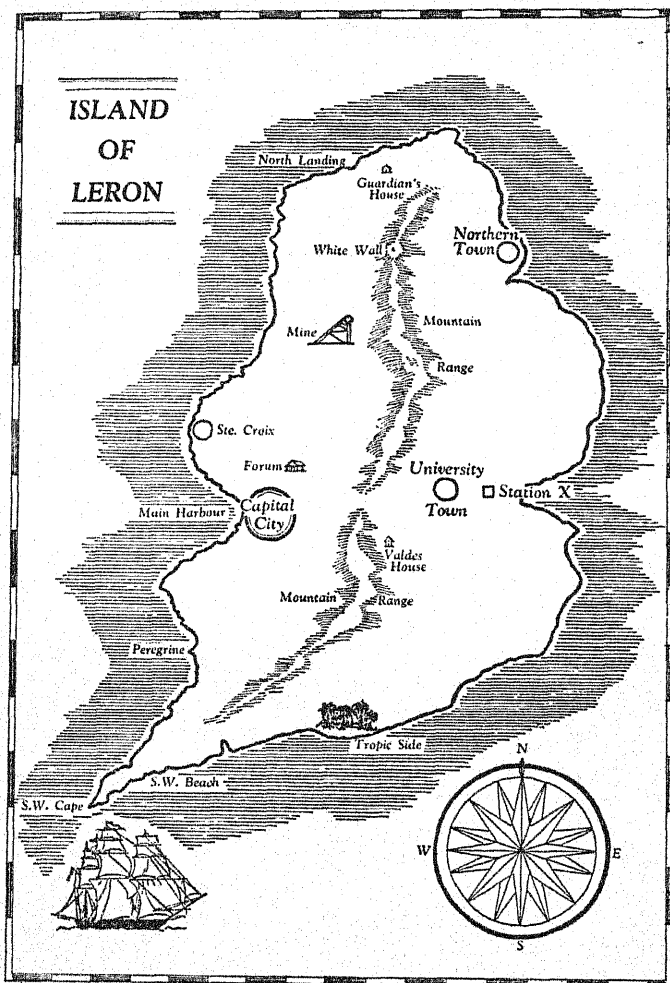
("So would anybody who'd won a hundred and seventy-five *mille* in one shot. And my goodness, how I dislike his talk about money. It's got a real Left-wing flavour.")

IX

MILLIE BOLTON had kept the Manila envelope on her desk all the afternoon. Now she was seated at her typewriter in the little back room that looked out on to the Boulevard de la République. It was a chintzy little room. English suburbia had put a foot down here. Millie had made herself a pot of Indian tea; now she drank the tea and took the script from its envelope.

The handwriting was certainly a man's, it was small, strong and legible. He made Greek e's and the stroke of each d curved back with a flourish. Millie believed that she could tell character from handwriting and it amused her now to attempt a sketch of the personality behind the script. She decided that he was kind, that he had conquered Natural Impulsiveness with Great Self-Control. "Not a person who loves easily," she added. Since he was a friend of the Reys, she could fill in his background. He belonged to that glamorous group, all colour and cosmopolitanism.

Mrs. Rey had said that these were notes, a report of some kind. Mrs. Rey was wrong. Or if these were indeed notes, they were the oddest notes that Millie had ever read. And there was no heading, merely the figure 1 at



the top of the first page. She put the paper and the two carbons into the machine. Her fingers moved and the small regular noise began:

1

When the sun came up, I could see the detail of the beach.

THE ISLAND I

I

WHEN the sun came up, I could see the detail of the beach. We were anchored to the south-west of Tropic Side, just off the Cape.

The sea was breaking on long white floors of sand. To the west, inland behind the dunes, I could make out the first foothills of the mountain range that forms a spine running up the centre of the island. With the mist still holding off the sunshine, the foothills were flat and blue. The Cape makes a sudden landfall, an arrowhead of low blue hills, dunes and white beaches, pointing out into the water. It looks as though there were no more of the island than this.

I have felt so often that I must go ashore here, at morning and alone, and I have never done it until today. Today was disturbing. I didn't know why they had called me back; I felt oddly out of touch. And I must not. If there were trouble on the island, I should want all my faculties, all my understanding, all of me—for what it is worth—to be ready.

There was a blur of unreality about this return. Therefore, I said to me, take things easily now you are here. Do what you have always wanted to do when you first sight Leron, take the dinghy and go ashore on South-West Beach. Feel the island under your feet again, sit and stare at all of it in your mind until it comes truly into focus. It is the only place that matters, you know that.

They let the boat down, and I rowed in to the shore. I heard the soft, tearing noise of the waves on the beach grow louder. I might be the only man coming to a new world, and this might be the first landfall, fresh and mysterious from the hand of God.

I shipped my oars and jumped out into the water. I splashed through the shallows, pulling the boat. She was

heavy when I began to haul her up the beach. I saw the track of her keel and the shapes of my own footprints disappearing in the wet sand. I came to firm sand, studded with small tender shells and traced with rags of sea-weed. I let the boat lie. Ahead the dunes rose to a height that cut off any further view; they have spiked crowns of awkward grass and dry pink flowers.

I threw myself down in a hollow of the sand. Whatever lay ahead, it was infinitely good to be here again. This is the beach of boyhood, where Peter and I used to light drift-wood fires; it is the beach of love and youth where I used to meet Valdes secretly. It is not only the beginning of the island, it is the beginning of me. When I long for Leron, I want this most of all. Perhaps the true meaning of nostalgia is not hankering after a place, but after the person one used to be.

When I was that boy, I thought, I used to take Leron for granted. Did I envy his rapturous irresponsibility, his innocence, his casual adventures here? Perhaps I did. But the urgency of the moment cut off his image. I knew that I must get the island image clear, get this odd sense of unfamiliarity out of the way, and then sail on towards Main Harbour to meet the thing that waited.

What could it be? My mind went up the beach, over the crests of the dunes, exploring Leron. I saw the whole map of it as though my spirit hung above it like a hawk in the wind. I saw the misty north, the peak of White Wall, a spear-head against the sky; I saw the wooded slopes above North Landing and the sea-fog lying below those trees. I saw the plateau that we call the Mine; I saw the beauty of the Capital City that is built upon Main Harbour; I saw the flat New Lands in the east and the palms on Tropic Side.

What could attack the island now, and I not there?

Like the hawk, my mind stooped on the possible sources of fear. There was the Lake, there was Station X. Nobody

but myself, I thought, would call them the sources of fear. Why do I? Because they are reminders of the world beyond us.

Yet we owe our heritage to the Lake. It is because of the Lake that all the island history came to be. Because of the Lake, when the world destroyed itself, Leron lived. I tried to picture the island as it was, before those days, when the Leronese natives lived undisturbed on Tropic Side, knowing nothing of war, nothing of civilisation; fishermen and fruit-farmers, a brown idle band whose ruler was Julian, the first Claimant. But of course I could not imagine it. Any more than I could picture the time when the first men landed here.

How long ago, now. Back before the dawn of the Second Civilisation. Then, out of the world that was perishing from the new weapons, the ship came and the first men came bearing what treasures they could save, and founded the Regime and made the beginning.

Because of the Lake.

It was the emanation from that dark underground sea that had saved Leron from the new weapons. And still, I thought, it saves the world from war. And when I call it the source of fear, when I wonder now whether this thing that threatens us comes from the Lake, what precisely do I mean? Do I mean that the Lake might fail, that today, for the island as for the world, there can be no more Leronite?

Oh nonsense, I said to myself, there will always be Leronite. Our scientists have promised us that. I stared at the Lake in my mind.

We have the records of how it looked when they first found it, the monstrous and surprising sea lying between the craters on the Western Side, with the tall coloured mist pouring upward off its surface and the same sulphurous smell that hangs there today. I couldn't really imagine that, either. The Lake is invisible now and it is the custom to

speak of the Mine instead. I could only look with the eyes of the contemporary islander, who sees the desert dotted with man-made molehills and the five tall towers. The contemporary islander takes the Mine for granted. But the Lake is there; three hundred feet below; and from that hidden surface the machinery set in motion by the towers draws up the secret miracle; the answer to all the new weapons that man, even in the Second Civilisation, could devise, the salvation and protection that is named Leronite.

Why, then, was I troubled when I thought of the Lake? "You know, don't you?" I said to myself alone on the beach. "Because it is total power. But it never frightened the first men. They saw that they were in possession of total power, power to restore mankind, power to save it. Generations were to pass before the effect of Leronite on the world could be known. Those men died long before their work prospered. But their vision was steady and faithful. Isn't yours?"

To that question I could say, "Yes. I know, I mean, that the island system is the only perfect system in which humanity can live. I know that the world, restored and healed, gone back to its old ways, still sees us as the holders of the perfect heritage. And I love Leron with all my heart. Perhaps that is why I am afraid for it."

"Afraid for it?" The far phantoms of the first men threw my words back at me. "How can you be afraid? The Charter endures today. That first Charter, all those years ago, made by us. It established what you inherit, the moneyless community, the makers, the agreement to work in the necessary trades, the refusal to admit progress as the answer to mankind's salvation. It established the Government that you lead today, the Council of Advisers. It gave you your title, the Guardian of the Law. How can you be afraid?"

"But look," I argued with them inside my head, "it is not a craven fear. I know how much we owe to you; how,

by divine accident, you evolved the perfect system. You couldn't use money, because you had none. You had to work or starve. As to progress, that had turned itself off automatically in the chaos of world destruction. I salute you and I reverence you. But I can't help feeling, you ghosts of Leron, that you would be afraid now. The world is strong again. Though here we have bred men and women of a different sort, they are beleaguered as you never were. Don't you see that? You must see that."

I flung my challenge at the long waves breaking, at the gulls in flight, and it went unheard. "All right," I said to them, "but there *is* a threat here. I have been called back, because of it."

Sources of fear. After the Lake, Station X. That is in the east, in the New Lands, north of the University Town. Our scientists work there, closely guarded, behind high walls. If there must be scientists, I said to myself, and there must be (though on this my brother Peter would certainly disagree with me), then we know how to handle them. Surely the Council could let no danger come to Leron from Station X? But Station X would always haunt me with anxiety, a troublous anachronism upon the map that I loved.

I rose now and walked to and fro on the beach. This was better, the disturbing sense of a dream had begun to fade. I was thinking along the island lines again, and there was perhaps nothing remarkable in the fact that I had found it difficult to do so after my sojourn in the world, though I did not remember having encountered this difficulty before. The world-journey is one of the Guardian's obligations. I find it the hardest of all.

"The Guardian's obligations," I repeated to myself as I strolled towards the boat. "How those three words hammer at you, do they not? They always have. Remember when you were first elected, when you thought that you shouldn't ask Valdes to marry you? You believed that the Guardian

should be celibate and superhuman, like a priest, that he should be a cross between a god and a machine if he were to do his work well."

I stood still at the edge of the sea, reminded that I was impatient and hungry for Valdes, that by this chosen loitering I was postponing the moment for which I ached. But the heavy sense of responsibility held me here a few minutes longer; it was as though I couldn't move until I had explored further in my mind.

If I had been Guardian two hundred years ago, I should have known whence trouble would come. From the storm-centre of Tropic Side, from the possibility of a Claimant's Revolution. There have been three in the island's lifetime. But not today, I thought. There'll be no more Revolutions; Tropic Side is a harmless playground, a playground for foreigners; and Julian (direct descendant of that first Julian? Perhaps. Nobody knows for certain), what is Julian but an entertainer? The man who barter the pleasures of Tropic Side as we barter Leronite? He wouldn't make trouble, even if he could.

The Claimant's story was one of the early developments on Leron. It was, I suppose, inevitable that the original native ruler should try to get his own island back and should, when he failed, hand on the tradition of discontent to his descendants. The Revolution always had as its basis the return of Leron to the world. The world, slowly emerging from its self-imposed wreckage, had an attraction for the strong succession of Claimants whose last rebel died two hundred years ago. Those men wanted money on the island, trade instead of barter with the two hemispheres. And they went on trial and the Regime survived.

And it is ludicrous, I said to myself, to think that Julian, today's Julian, could possibly bring that old grievance into into the air again. I knew him too well. The traditional world-hankering from Tropic Side had evolved and mellowed long before he was born. What he had now was

what he liked to have; the foreign ships coming in on summer nights; the glass palace where he entertained the world-visitors, his little lighted kingdom that was built for fun and for nothing else. Julian liked his life and I could be sure also that he loved Leron because Leron let him live it. In the world, he would have been subject to the operators from the Western hemisphere, a paid impresario. Here he was king of his small territory; he could say No to anybody and he could, if he wished, turn every foreigner off Tropic Side without consulting the Council. That privilege dates from the first case brought against the new men by the first Claimant; he who said, "Leron belongs to me". Their reply was, "No, it belongs to us, but we grant you the possession of your own territory with the right to rule it as you please, provided that it keeps the peace."

"No threat from Julian in my lifetime," I repeated, "that's impossible." I knew, of course, that there did exist on Tropic Side a small clique whose hobby was to keep the old grievance alive. The few white people who live south are eccentrics; and this was an eccentric's game that they played. They debated the Claimant's case; they set up the ancient argument in terms of International Law; they read papers on the history of the Revolution. They were led by an elderly lawyer called Amyas. Julian despised them, though they used his title pedantically and boasted that they could prove the direct line of his descent.

Could they, that odd, dwarfish band of experts, put their theory into practice? I couldn't imagine its happening. I couldn't imagine anybody taking them seriously. Certainly Julian did not, except last year when he asked me if I could get them off the island. He was a little more serious than usual that night; he had found that they included among their capers a project called the blue-print, a complete plan, they alleged, for turning Leron over to the world in our lifetime. But it was a game, I said, part of the game; it wasn't dangerous.

That verdict I held to now. And as I restated it, banishing Tropic Side from my mind, I saw that the sun was stronger; a sharp blue shadow lay along the hull of my ship, standing offshore. Time to be going. I shoved the dinghy down the beach and out through the first waves.

The dazzle on the waters all around me made everything unreal again. To right and left in the blue hollows, little stars of refracted light were shining and breaking. I was rowing my boat through eternity. And were those the cold far voices of the first men talking still? Perhaps the cry of the gulls made the voices. There was one voice telling me that I must rest, but that was hallucination; a trick; how could I rest now?

Were these perhaps my own doubts asking, "How strong are you? How much of a man are you? Could you put all your strength between Leron and the danger that threatens it? And know that your strength would win? Or, if the island perished, could you rebuild it again? Out of your own mind, with your memories, your beliefs, your energies, working like coral insects to restore the fabric? Could you do this, Guardian of the Law?"

"I could. I'd have no choice. There is no other way."

"And if the thing that is wrong comes from a different source? If it comes from within? From a flaw in the pattern of Leron itself? What then?"

I knew the answer to that one, "If it were so, and it could, I suppose, be so, then the remedy is in the Charter. It is the Regime itself that must go on trial."

Now I felt as though I had resolved the last doubt, seen the last vision. I was back in a reality of sunshine and salt water. I was rowing under the stern of my own ship, looking up at the faces of my own men along the rail.

II

We had exchanged signals with Main Harbour. A vessel of Coast Patrol, with the Deputy-Guardian on board, would meet us off Peregrine. It is a two-hour cruise from South-West Cape to Peregrine. We struck rough weather here, but the sun still shone and I stayed on deck, watching the high seas sway up to us and past us, the horizon pressing downward, the little tilted coastline that was Leron.

Peregrine now. A pyramid of reddish cliffs and tawny rocks with the white waves at their foot and the white seabirds as small as butterflies about the crest. The long grey craft of Coast Patrol was wallowing, bows under. I stood by the rail and watched the small boat riding the swell. Peter was there; I could see his head and shoulders hunched low, the glitter of the sun on his hair and on the gilded epaulettes; his aide was with him.

It is hard for me always to greet him again thus, with the men of the crew standing to attention, with the formal salute and the handshake.

While I am in the world, because Peter can never make that journey with me, I do not feel as though I had a brother. And I have a haunting fear that one day I shall come back to find him gone. (Gone where? Gone, why? Peter would not leave the island.) And I think, I said to myself, as all the hands came up to the salute, I've never been so glad to see him before. I have piled up anxiety in my head, I have drowned in thought alone and now to find him standing before me is too violent a relief. Peter has the face of an irritable seraph; he looks enormous in his Legion uniform. Women love him hopelessly and he loves them all for twenty-four hours each. The only woman whom he could have loved for longer is Valdes, the three of us know that.

Peter's formality broke down as we reached the top of the companion-way. He slapped my back hard. "You've

been away too long, blast you," he said affectionately, "I'd forgotten what you looked like."

"How long have I been gone?"

"Nearly four months."

"It's too much, Peter. I swear I won't do the world journey again."

"Ah, that sounds like sense."

He shut the door of the saloon behind us and flung off his wet greatcoat. There was wine on the table. We poured two glasses and drank. For one frightening moment, as he raised his glass, I saw that the blur of unreality lay upon him also. I wanted to call him by another name. I put my hand to my forehead.

"Are you ill?" he asked me quickly; he grasped my arm above the elbow.

"No, I'm all right. The world mixes me up, I think. Who is Howard?" I said.

"Howard? Never heard of him."

"Funny; it was on the tip of my tongue to call you Howard instead of Peter."

"Well, you can if it makes you feel better," he said, but he was watching me anxiously.

"I'm all right," I repeated. "It's been this way, a little, ever since we sighted Leron. I couldn't be losing my memory, could I?"

"No, it isn't that." He refilled his glass. I stared steadily at his profile and the odd moment went over. "But you know," he said, perching on the table, "it was time we called you back. Even if none of this had happened."

"None of what, Peter?"

He grimaced. "It isn't a pretty homecoming at all."

"No, that I understood. Can you tell me what has gone wrong, what the threat is?"

"I can tell you some of it now. The Council will tell you the rest. We're meeting at Dalzano's house."

"At Ste Croix? Not at the Capital?"

"No. Better not, we thought."

"Not put in at Main Harbour at all?"

"No. There's serious trouble, two distinct factions."

They were heavy words. And yet it seemed that I had expected to hear them.

"And when you've heard me and the Council," Peter said, staring at the tip of his boot, "you'll hear the rest from Valdes."

"She'll be at Ste Croix?"

"No, old boy, she won't. She'll wait for you at North Landing."

Valdes is a member of the Council. More, in my absence she has always shared authority with Peter. I doubt that he would take any important step without consulting her.

"Why that?" I asked.

"Would you rather meet Valdes, for the first time for months, at an emergency Council meeting, or alone?" Peter snapped.

"My wishes don't enter into this. Nor do hers. If there is serious trouble and the Council meets, Valdes should be there."

He said more patiently, "No, it isn't quite like that. There's no Council decision to be taken, you see. The thing has happened. We've no choice."

"Where did it begin? What is it?"

"It began from Tropic Side," he said, "and it's Revolution."

After that it felt like an hour before either of us spoke again.

Then I heard myself saying calmly, "World Revolution? The case against Leron?"

"Yes. The Claimant's case."

"Julian for Claimant?"

"Who else?"

"He wouldn't do this."

"He has done this."

"Why?"

"We don't know. It looks like a foreign scheme; why he fell in with it remains a mystery."

"When did it begin?"

"A week ago. But the blue-print must have been in existence a long time."

(The blue-print; Julian's anxiety and myself saying "But it's only a game.")

"I knew about the blue-print," I said.

Peter's fist crashed on the table, "You *and* Valdes? God's truth, what am I to hear next?"

"Why," I said, "Julian told us both. A year ago. It was the toy of Amyas and his little gang; that's all."

"Yes. That was all. And that was enough, once it was put into operation, to split Leron in half in a week. God, they've been clever." He got up and paced, seeming to grow larger, as always in time of strong emotion.

"Money on the island," he flung at me. "Money minted on Leron. Silver coins with your head on one side and Julian's head on the other. The mine-workers, the men of the Legion, the students, all fed with pamphlets so damnably smooth and plausible that you'd think the devil had written them. A foreign invasion from the south. Demonstrations in the Capital; fighting at the Mine; and the simplest of them all, the farmers and the fishermen, flocking to Tropic Side. How's that for a toy? Magnificent, I'd say."

My mind was still pinned to the thought of Julian as I knew him: Julian the contented king of the world's playground. I saw the shape of the dark head, the tough graceful body in the white jacket; the merry eyes. "Oh no," I thought, "I'm dreaming again. Julian couldn't make it happen; wouldn't want to make it happen."

"Does he declare himself Claimant?" I asked.

"Yes. But he doesn't want to rule. He appoints himself the right to hand Leron over to the world."

"He's insane."

"I wish I thought so."

"What's the point of money? How can they use it?"

"He's teaching them how. All along the water-front at Tropic Side there are shops where you can buy. He's opened gambling-rooms. He's put a gang into the market to sabotage the distribution. A foreign gang. All the demonstrations are being worked by foreigners. And the demonstrations, the pamphlets say, are planned as lessons that can teach the simplest islander how stupidly wrong the Regime is. As soon as Leron understands that, Leron will vote for the world. On what he calls the moral problem he's even more eloquent. Here; take a look at this." He slapped down the pamphlet in front of me.

"Our boast has long been that we live as we do because of the beliefs and traditions handed down to us from the first men. It is a doubtful boast.

"Would those first men approve of us to-day? Would they—who found the means to restore the world—agree that we should live on in separation from a world restored? Would they agree to our absolute control of the source of power? To our absolute barter system? To our strict and continued isolation?

"Or would they say, 'You have betrayed our Trust. It was our dream to see a Second Civilisation rebuilt on the ruins of the first. It is rebuilt, and Leron alone has no part in it. Leron alone remains tied to the past; a slave to its own history'?

"We are as though we had resigned from the human race, and insolently continue to regulate its affairs because we are the men in possession.

"But Leronite belongs to the world, not to the island. And the island itself belongs to the world. And we belong to the world. For years our Council and our rulers have imprisoned us in a dead tradition. The time has come to

break down the old false walls and live as free men in the brotherhood of man."

I felt a darkness begin to creep in my mind. The words were the distortion of a truth, not wholly a lie. I did not want to read any more. I said, "Do we know who wrote it?"

"No," said Peter.

"Julian couldn't put six consecutive words on paper."

"Julian's merely the figurehead in all this. I tell you, it's a foreign scheme."

"What steps have you taken?"

"The island's under martial law. I'm sorry, I knew you'd hate to hear that; but I'd no alternative. The foreigners have been given twenty-four hours' notice to quit, with guaranteed safe-conduct until then."

"And Julian?"

"I was all for pulling him in at once. But the Council voted against me."

"The Charter allows him time to withdraw the Claim."

"I know. He's had it. If there's no reply from him by now, he goes on trial. The Order's there and ready for you to sign."

"And the islanders? You said two distinct factions. Leron split in half. So soon?"

Peter got up and poured himself another drink. "That's more difficult to explain," he said, staring past me.

"You mean that there is evidence of real sympathy for the world case? Among our own people?"

Peter now looked so uncomfortable that he might not be the Deputy-Guardian and the Legion Commander, but his eight-year-old self with a stomach-ache.

"Well, go on," I said. "Tell me if there is. I have to know."

He picked up his glass and set it down without drinking. He looked me in the eyes. "I can't tell you, old boy, for the

excellent reason that I don't understand what it's all about. Nor does the Council. The only person who can tell you that is Valdes."

III

We sailed into the small harbour of Ste Croix under the light of a golden afternoon. It is a town that I love; the town that has become the property of the artists and fishermen. We stood on deck, watching it draw near; the old port and the bell-tower and the pinkish, climbing houses. Behind the town are the vine-covered hills; before it the waterfront planted with plane trees. On the beach the painted fishing boats are drawn up and the silvery nets spread out to dry.

It is a tranquil place; and it was a tranquil mood of Leron that came to meet me here, like a soft wind blowing off the harbour. The black Council car drawn up at the quayside looked incongruously official. So did the soldiers of the Legion at the pierhead. We took their salute as we went by. So unused was I to the idea of martial law on Leron that it took me several minutes to realise why they were there.

We drove up through the town. The main square was empty, hung with the hot silence of early afternoon. The café tables were deserted. Beside the fountain with the stone cherubs in the centre of the square two more soldiers of the Legion came to the salute.

Now the iron gates and the courtyard of Dalzano's house; the long room with the french-windows looking out on to a formal garden.

And the six men waiting.

The red-headed and rawboned Scansen, Adviser for the Mine; the black-browed Bernard, who speaks for the Senate; Michaelis, stocky and blond, the youngest of the

Council, Adviser for Education; Tribe, whose façade seems always too colourless, too careful, to suit the Adviser for the dangerous affairs at Station X; Pendean, a bullock of a man, Adviser for Main Harbour; Dalzano, Adviser for Foreign Intelligence, with his air of a mincing grandee; it is a deceptive air.

The long table, the eight of us moving to our places; and now, I thought, it is not the blur of unreality that hides their faces from me; it is more a scalpel of truth that strips them to the essence of what they are and makes a mathematical symbol of them; equating them with all the men in history who ever met around a table to decide the thing that must be done.

Dalzano saying, "The foreign element has not accepted our offer. It has merely withdrawn to Tropic Side."

Pendean saying, "Main Harbour is quiet and there has been no disturbance in the Capital since yesterday."

Bernard saying, "The Senate is still awaiting Julian's reply. We need expect none."

Scansen saying, "I am sorry to report that the pamphlet has had a considerable effect upon the workers at the Mine."

Tribe saying, "All further experiments at Station X are suspended until the crisis is over."

Michaelissaying, "The University will remain in vacation."

We looked at the clock. The time was past. The paper lay before me, the Order as originally phrased in the year of the first Claimant's Revolution.

"Whereas you have, without authority other than your own, raised yourself up in rebellion against the Government of Leron and whereas

in fidelity to the Charter, we have solemnly requested the withdrawal of your Claim and whereas,

within the period of time allotted to you under the Charter, you have ignored this request,

Now I, the Guardian of the Law, with the full agreement

of the Council of Advisers, do hereby empower my officers of the Island Legion to take you from your own land and bring you before us, to await trial and judgment."

But these words, I thought, these pompous and antique phrases, were for the eyes of the historic rebels. I could not imagine this parchment served on Julian. I saw him again clearly as I took the pen in my hand. The showman with the ready smile. He does not talk this language. His idiom, after years of catering to a Western clientèle, is the modern idiom of the West. The words here should be different; he will not understand them. (Nor could I see the men of the Legion marching in on that coast of pleasure, to hale him out of the rainbow-coloured room where the dancers moved on the glass floor. In image, it was laughable.)

I caught Peter's eye. He looked immense and impatient, wholly the Legion Commander, a *massif* whose outlines were made by the gold hair and the gold epaulettes. He was drumming with his fingers on the table. The Legion, after all, is Peter's favourite toy; and in our lifetime of peace he has never had enough chance to play with it. But there was a private worry in his head. The round forehead wrinkled and the lower lip pouted. I could hear the echo of his words, back in the cabin of the ship: "The only person who can tell you that is Valdes."

It was a phrase that continued to haunt me and disturb me as I signed my name at the foot of the parchment. After I had signed, there was a different atmosphere among the Advisers; a relaxing of tension followed by a burst of talk.

The shadows were lengthening in the garden outside. The reflection of sunset began to blaze across the terraced hills; soon the sky was all reddened plumes of cloud on greenish-blue; and still we talked until the faces became silhouettes and Dalzano's servants brought in the candles.

Time for me to go. I left them to their last detailed pre-occupations; Peter drove me back to the harbour.

"No clue, was there?" I said as our lights swept ahead of us into the dark.

"Were you hunting a clue?" His voice was toneless, abrupt.

"Weren't we all? We none of us have the remotest idea what made this happen."

"You heard Dalzano: foreign interest has been pointing our way for a long time now."

"Pointing our way. Not throwing stones through our windows."

"Well," Peter said, "however it breaks, I've no more worries now you're back."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

We came to the waterfront. The dark sky met the dark sea. The harbour lights and the masthead lights of my ship let fall their reflections in fiery flakes. At the pier the men of the Legion stood like stiff black statues. Then the noise of their feet rasped on the stone.

Peter came with me to the foot of the gangway.

"Good-night, old boy. God bless you. Till tomorrow."

"God bless you, Peter."

I went up the gangway. I leaned on the rail to watch him go. I saw what I had not seen as we came to the dockside; that there was a native boy standing alone under the harbour lamp nearest to the ship. He seemed to be waiting for Peter.

Though Ste Croix is the town furthest south, you do not, as a rule, see the Leronese natives here. They live beyond the border, on Julian's land, and they keep to their own place.

The light from the lamp made the boy's hair glisten; it touched his moving hand. He was throwing some small thing into the air and catching it again. I saw Peter halt, a towering silhouette; then the scared pose of the boy's body and the quick gesture handing over the small thing before

he ran. He shot away into the dark. Peter came back to the foot of the gangway. He called "Catch!" I caught it.

After many weeks in the world, there is nothing strange to me in the feel of coin, though when I first leave Leron, money seems a highly fussy and unfamiliar circumstance. I stared at this coin in my palm. Peter called "Good timing, wasn't it? I'll give the men on the pierhead hell." Then he saluted me and walked away.

It was a large silver coin. The device, as Peter had told me, was my own head in profile, with the word Leron and the date of the year engraven below. I turned it over and saw Julian's head on the other side. I was surprised to find how much I hated it. I had heard the words, "Money minted on Leron" and they had meant so much less than the fact in my hand meant now.

I threw the coin into the water. They were pulling up the gangway. I went to stand in the bows, feeling the sea-wind slap my face and flutter my lashes; it hurt; it was good; I liked it.

It is not only, I said to myself, because I have been trained in the island tradition that I know money to be the worst thing. I have seen it proved.

In the Second Civilisation, as in the first, they delude themselves that it is not; that with the right distribution it can be a harmless and functional token; no more. But the human animal is never as wise as he thinks himself. As long as there is the token, it can become the symbol of tyranny, of greed, of avarice.

You may say, I argued with myself, while we glided across the harbour and out to sea, that the thing of which man must rid himself is the fault and not the symbol. But the symbol, to take the parallel of a statue in a church, helps to direct prayer, acts as a pointer for the thoughts, is not itself worshipped but makes worship easier. So the money symbol guides us towards evil. And no mathematical distribution will ever solve this, because man is all that

mathematics are not; he is variable and unpredictable. He cannot stay in the equation of A Minus, which you need only change into A Plus to make all equal.

Give four men the same sum of money at morning. By evening one will have spent it; one will have spent nothing; one will have spent half and saved the rest; one will have overspent and incurred a debt. So much for equal distribution.

It's incredible to me that in both hemispheres now they are still pathetically grubbing after an economic answer. In the East, the united collectivists have reduced all standards and still demonstrate unhappiness, injustice, inequality. In the West the united money-changers whoop their followers along to the rich man's millennium, with the same result.

Now I could see the distant lights of Main Harbour, the faint glow of the Capital City on the hill. And I was heartened. A mood of truculent certainty began. No creed so idiotic, I said to myself, could take root on Leron. And I was momentarily at peace when I went below to eat my dinner. But afterwards, walking the deck, disquiet came back on the night wind.

This, the last, is always the longest stage of the journey. Though I could feel and judge our speed, I could not believe it. I paced the throbbing deck as I have paced it many times on my home-coming. Here was the familiar frame of impatience, with the stars aloft, and below, the lighted spray falling back from our sides. Here by all precedent, my thoughts should have plunged ahead towards Valdes. But tonight I was playing another game. I was measuring my certainty against my doubt, my courage against my fear.

"We have bred men and women of a different sort here." Was that true, or was it a comfortable cliché? Would the people of Leron hold to Leron, or would they turn to the world?

The horizon was dark; the land hid from me. Behind the lost coastline a human shape was walking, veiled and invisible; a man whom I should know; the islander.

"And what do I know? Think hard, think quickly, remember.

"I know that he has little sense of property. He does not want things for the sake of owning them. This derives from the first men. (The line from the old diary, in the library: 'War teaches one most effectively what one can do without'.)

"Today it has become a strong instinct, a natural instinct.

"What else? He is a maker. Making is a part of his religion. That's from the beginning too. The old Leron, Leron where the ark of the world landed, was the last sanctuary of the craftsman. We are still craftsmen because the skill of the ancestor has been handed down and learned and kept alive in every family.

"So far I know. He has never wanted to own very much; and he is a maker; a naturally independent animal; building his house, making his music, acting his own plays, carving his children's toys. They don't do those things in the world.

"And the world doesn't like to go slow. The islander does. Our highways are for the Council cars, for the vans that distribute from the market. The islander keeps off the highway. He doesn't want to own a car, he rides horseback on the smaller roads, or takes the inland waterways. He's had the wish for speed bred out of him. He wouldn't use trains or aeroplanes even if we had them.

"And he likes to be quiet. He hates noise as a cat hates it. The world is again full of radio-sets and gramophones; the world cacophony would deafen him. If he wanted a radio, he could have one. But he doesn't. The same with a newspaper. He doesn't want one. He gets his news from the Information building in the Capital."

"But these things," said the doubting whisper at my ear, "are of tradition. All that has gone to make him is your

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tradition. What did the pamphlet call Leron? 'A slave to its own history'?

"Is it slavery to live as you like, to work because you like to work? To dress as you like? There's another thing," I said, "that defines us. Our fashions in dress are to the world outrageous, because we have no fashions. If the islander wants to wear knee-breeches, as Dalzano does, or a toga as Rydal the artist does, he can. Nobody will ask him to conform to a surface pattern."

The whisper went on: "But isn't your pattern, the island pattern, now rigid and set; in a mould of inflexible heritage? Has this man, this person walking inland, where you cannot see, ever had the chance to know another life?"

"He has. Nobody who wants to leave is asked to stay. He is free to go into the world. Every year there are some who go."

"But don't you need new blood? More new blood than you allow to come in? Look at the ridiculous limits to your quota. Leron could hold more than twice its present population."

"Yes," I said, "I know it could. But only if we change its whole face; if we build more towns. And the islander likes space. He doesn't like towns. He wants Leron the way it is."

"You speak for him very confidently, don't you?"

"I do. I must. He has elected me to speak for him."

"And yet, Guardian of the Law, can you be certain that this is so, that you are in fact pleading his cause; not merely pursuing a dream of your own mind?"

"If Leron were a dream of my own mind," I said, "there would come a time when I must wake; to find that the dream was over."

"Perhaps that time is near."

But the last mockery sounded faintly upon my ears. The horizon had changed; there was a light shining, a small, steady light across the water. Darker than the dark, I saw the wooded hills rise above North Landing. I was home.

IV

It won't be real, I thought, until I see her and hear her voice. Here I am, looking up at the house, the white Palladian façade like a temple against the dark trees. It is my house; and though I cannot see the garden I know it by heart and I have hungered for this smell of sea and leaves and wood-smoke mixing. But it is none of it real yet. Even now, as the door swings open, reality isn't here. To return means only that the fabric of memory brightens and restores itself, like a tapestry whose colours are suddenly made new and brilliant; that is all it is. I am acutely aware of the hall with the white panels, the dark oil-painting and the graceful curve of the staircase, but these have long been assembled in my mind. I can conjure them when I need them. I can go up these stairs, walk down this passage, come to the door. But I can't make the door open.

I opened it.

We stood still, looking at each other. I do not think that there was a word spoken, nor a word that needed to be spoken. Although she was waiting for me, although she had heard my step, the most palpable feeling in the room was that she was unprepared. "You have come too soon," the feeling in the room said.

I looked into the face that has been the face of my consolation, that has been my home, and saw that it was changed. In the change, in the look that was not fearful but sorrowful, there was a deadly memory of something that had happened to me before. (When? In a dream that foreshadowed tonight?)

I thought, "She is here, in her own flesh, her own likeness, but the Valdes I knew has gone. She is somebody else; somebody I have loved but never trusted; somebody who would run away if she could."

I thought, "Why has she never run away? She has

wanted to. And I have not known that until now. The lively spirit, the foreign light-heartedness that I loved, belonged neither to me nor to the island. And I did not know.

"She has merely assumed the trust I gave her; she has moulded herself into the pattern of the Guardian's wife. She has acted faithfully the person I wanted her to be.

"I see another person now. I see all that I have never seen (except the laughter; laughter is out of her) and I see what has been so long hidden; this that makes her not Valdes in my eyes is the person who is really Valdes; the person behind the faithful mask.

"She must have felt this moment of separation from me before; and I? I feel it now for the first time. I do not understand how she can tell me so much, merely by standing there, looking sadly and charitably into my face, waiting for my judgment. Perhaps this minute of clairvoyance is a nightmare; if I shut my eyes and open them again, she will hold out her hands to me."

But I dared not shut my eyes. I went on staring at her; at the dark beauty of her head and face; the exquisite bones, the lighted look of the skin, the long neck. No, I thought; she has never belonged to the island; always it has been an enemy, the dark, foreign thing.

I heard her voice ask, "What have they told you?"

I said, "Nothing. They have told me nothing." I shut the door behind me and took a step towards her; only a step. Her look held me off.

I thought, "I'd like to see you smile again; the smile changes your face, makes all that stillness become animal and alive. I remember Peter saying to me, 'When she laughs, my bones break.' Valdes, I remember so many things. I see you walking to meet me on South-West Beach. I waited, knowing that it was my destiny you carried, though you looked as though you held nothing in your hands; you walked lightly. You made a long-legged shadow. The

sun was in your eyes and your skin was brown and your hair shone. I couldn't tell, watching you come, whether you had chosen me or whether you had decided that it was the end for us. I remember thinking that I could die of not having you. It was a childish thought, wasn't it? One doesn't die of that, nor of this.

"Who was the man you chose, that day, Valdes, and why did you choose him? He was, against all precedent, elected Guardian of the Law at twenty-eight. He was a fanatic in his love for Leron; he was a demon for work; he was old beyond his years in self-discipline; he was ruthless.

"He didn't talk easily, as Peter talked. He didn't want to. A part of himself went alone inside his head always, and it never occurred to him that you would want that arrogant, active prisoner to come out and talk to you.

"Why, I ask you, did you choose him? Because he was the Guardian of the Law? Because he seemed to you a person of one mood and you were tired of the thunder and lightning moods of Peter's love? You were wrong. You would have been less lonely with Peter. You were made for the quarrels and the laughter. You were made for freedom and the Guardian's wife is not free.

"But you should have warned me. You should not have acted so well, so conscientiously that I was fooled. At the beginning, of course, I could see that it was difficult for you; it had to be. I took that for granted. I took so much for granted; and by the time that you had moulded yourself into the pattern I wanted, I believed that you also wanted it. Was I innocently blind or deliberately blind? Perhaps deliberately. I could not have gone on, I think, if I had admitted to myself that you no longer loved me; if I had admitted that my devotion to Leron made you hate it. You do hate it, don't you, Valdes? Answer me."

But I did not say this. I clamoured at her in thought; and the wood falling on the fire was the only sound in the room.

My words still hung here, because they were the last words spoken: "They have told me nothing."

"They were right. It is for me to tell you."

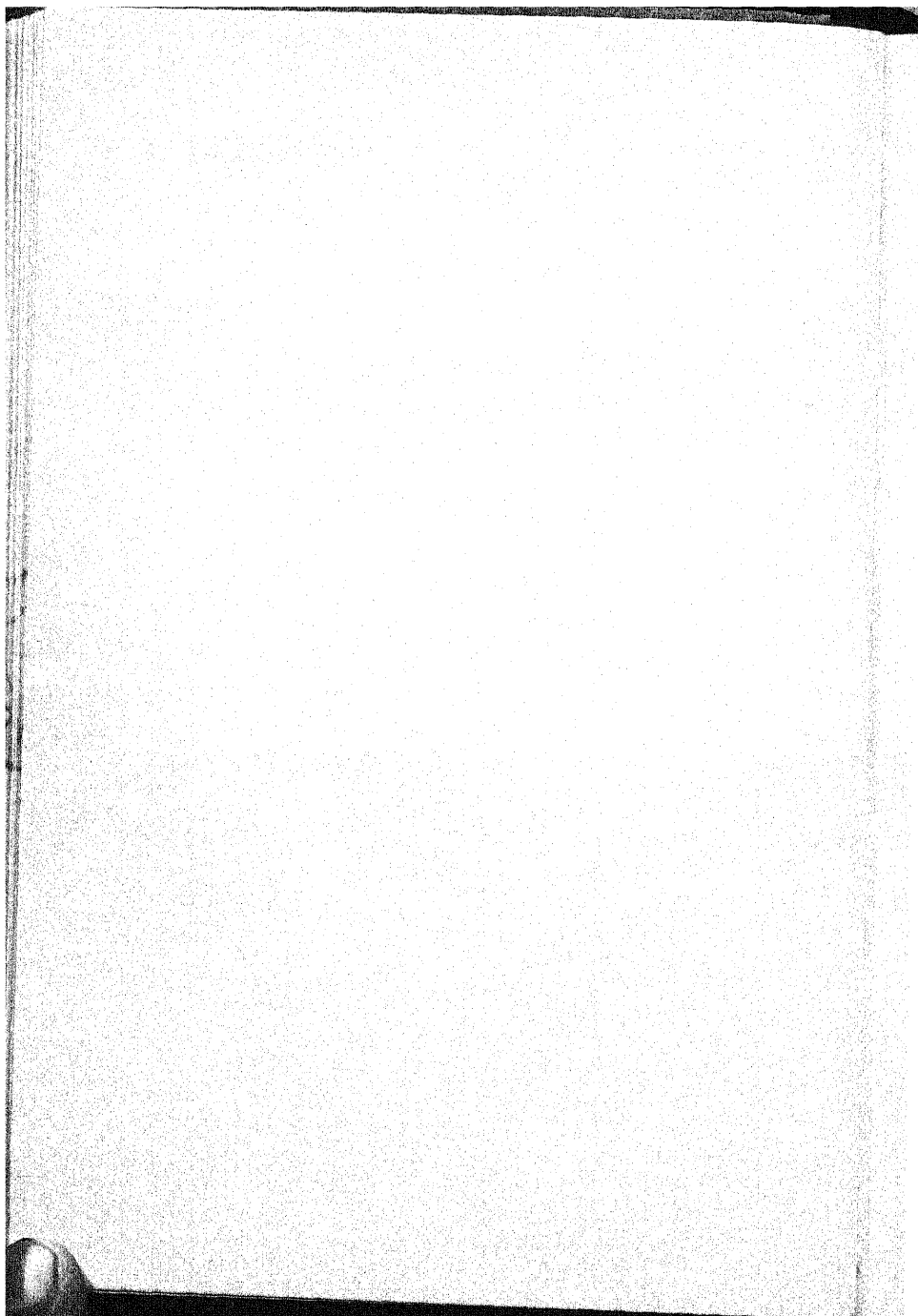
"Yes."

"Before I do, I'll say this. It won't be easy for you to remember afterwards. Nor easy to believe."

She looked at me attentively, as though trying to hear my thoughts. Then she said, "Still, it is true. So I say it now. You and I—at last—want the same thing. Whatever must be done here, you and I must do it together. I have no life now that isn't the island's life."

I saw that this was true. I did not know what had made it true. Like a man reprieved from death, I waited.

THE WORLD II



I

ON Saturday, the American Travel Office shut its doors at noon. "Too early for lunch," Millie Bolton decided. "I'll just have a coffee at the Voile Bleue and go straight back and finish the typing." The Voile Bleue faced the Croisette, two doors away from American Travel. Millie sat at a table on the terrace, blinking at the light. The East wind had brought the hard fine weather, the authentic blaze of Riviera sunshine. "And my eyes feel very hot and small, like sore raisins and my back aches. I oughtn't to have worked so late. And I don't know why I'm fussing to get back to it now, with only twelve pages more to do." She jiggled impatiently with a spoon at the filter that was letting the coffee drip with exasperating slowness into the cup. "Bother these café-filtres; why can't the French make cups of coffee that are just cups of coffee? But there's no hurry. I don't know why I feel as if there is.

"It's the queerest feeling. It's the way I feel when I've been up late talking to somebody very odd and unorthodox, like a Communist or a Roman Catholic, and the next day I can't get their arguments out of my head. It's like being haunted or hypnotised and I don't know what's enjoyable about it. There were mornings in the London blitz when I felt like this too, absolutely tired out and excited as well. Awfully glad for no reason. As though——"

Yes, it was the same old thought, making the same old wish. "As though something wonderful were going to happen." It was the sense of magic adventure waiting. The conviction stayed with her always; even now, even in the wisdom of her late thirties when she ought to know that there were no magic adventures except this one, the belief that there might be.

She scalded the tip of her tongue with the coffee. She

paid her bill. She walked across the road to where her small blue car was waiting; the blue tin beetle that was something of an absurdity here in high summer, when it dodged between the spectacular monsters driven by the rich. Now it stood alone between a palm and a mimosa in full flower. It was unobtrusively itself. Millie loved it; she felt that the garage-man in the rue de la République accorded it a rightful dignity: "*La voiture de Mlle Bolton*" was a nobler phrase than "Miss Bolton's car".

She blinked at the brilliance of sky and sea. She thought of London buses on their ferry service between drab office-buildings and drab avenues of boarding-houses under the rain. She said thank you to a god who sometimes wore the domed head and white moustaches of a city solicitor, saying, "Your father's estate will bring you in just three thousand pounds." By these words, Millie, the only daughter, was set free of Putney at last. The girls at the office had thought her very brave to pull up her roots and go abroad; the war had done that for many people; not for Millie, combining her Reserved Occupation with the care of her old peevish father. "But somehow it's just like you," they said. "You would. Isn't it just like Millie? Yes, just like Millie. You'll have a wonderful time; lots of queer adventures; probably marry a millionaire; there aren't any more millionaires. Yes, there are, foreign millionaires."

And they said, in their occasional letters, that now she was fixed up with American Travel she would probably marry an American millionaire.

But they said that to be kind. Long ago, they had written Millie Bolton down in their minds as the sort of person who had odd, unexpected adventures, a lot of fun in her way, which wasn't their way (look at the time in '37 when she hitch-hiked to Rome.) The sort of person who would go on doing those things until she was quite an old lady. Because the true adventure, the only valid adventure, a husband of her own, would never come to Millie Bolton. She knew

that this was their verdict, despite the well-worn joke about the millionaire; and she agreed with it. Only occasionally, with awful frankness, did she dare admit to herself that she didn't want a husband very much.

The thing that she liked best was the daily extraordinary sense of freedom; the blend of curiosity, time-to-burn and magic-on-the-way. If (as she had read) there was something called the Joy of Living, then she knew that she was its possessor. She could get moments of idiotic happiness out of nothing at all; grinning at the kettle on the stove, staring at a cloud. But that was because of the absurd belief that it (whatever it was; and she was tolerably certain that it was not a husband) would happen some day.

She had never yet felt "I'd rather be me than anybody else in the world". And she knew that this was the magic for which she had waited half a lifetime.

She drove the blue tin beetle off the Croisette, across the rue d'Antibes to her own front door. It was a heavy oak door; inside was a tiled hall, echoing, chilly, musty; and the alarming little elevator at the back. Every time that she landed safely, the elevator felt more frail and fortunate. In the first year that she lived here, she had walked up the two long flights of stairs.

"Funny about Mrs. Rey," Millie thought, looking for her latchkey: "'Important notes. Confidential. Nobody ought to see them but you'." Did Mrs. Rey know all about this peculiar island story, or did she know nothing? Nothing, Millie suspected; why tell a lie so soon to be discovered?

Here, in the sun-striped room, last night seemed still to be going on. She had left the typewriter open, holding a page half finished; she had left the cretonne cushion bunched against the back of the chair. When she sat down, the stiff ache in her body and arms returned faithfully.

She had read to the end last night. Here it came again, the baffling pause in the narrative. She took the last page out of the machine, began to arrange the sheets in order.

After a time she found that she was thinking about the story as though it were true; as though the island were not merely a fantasy of the future, but an actual place.

"Like a man reprieved from death, I waited."

"But there can be no reprieve for him," she thought and then jumped, wondering where that thought had come from; wondering how she could possibly feel acquainted with the writer's intention. She was sleepy now; too sleepy to bother about lunch. The nicest thing to do would be to lie on the bed; make up last night's arrears before she drove to Mrs. Rey's house to deliver the typescript. She could still feel enjoyably guilty and defiant for skipping a meal; she thought that she always would. She drew the curtains across the sunshine.

II

ON the gravel hump of the peninsula, between the half-built house and the sea, Howard Rey stood with Brooke Alder. "Well, there you are," he said doubtfully, having come to the end of the conducted tour and feeling a twinge of anti-climax. Brooke remained silent, hands in pockets, head tilted back, eyes narrowed against the noon sunlight, appraising the house.

"There must," he said at last, "be an immense satisfaction in it; in making something. I never made anything."

"No? Your career and your fortune don't count?"

"Differently," said Brooke. As they strolled toward the broken balustrade, Howard felt that here Brooke stepped on dangerous ground; that Ines must be still haunting the place where yesterday he had leaned to smoke his pipe and remember.

"You could do more, I suppose?" Brooke was saying.

"If I weren't so darn lazy."

He saw the speculation in the blue eyes.

"I'm careful about what I take on, you see. Too careful, perhaps. Maybe it's a bad thing to be able to afford to discriminate."

It was a feeble bluff. Anybody as intelligent as Brooke would know that it was Harriette who did the discriminating; would have seen by now that Harriette called the tune and that he, Howard, was content for it to be so.

Brooke said, "Not necessarily a bad thing. What about America?" He fired the question as though it were the first point on an agenda in his mind. "Ever want to go back?"

"Sometimes I do. But I like the life here. Harriette's a wonderful manager. Takes endless trouble; with everything, particularly with me. Guess I'm spoilt."

Because of yesterday's thoughts on this spot, he could feel the old sense of intimacy with Brooke. The years had telescoped. "But it's none of it what I meant to do," he heard himself say.

"No, it never is. You married because you were in love, though."

"Oh, sure."

They spoke so quietly that they might have been their own ghosts, bodiless; unemotional; polite; comparing notes on past lives.

Brooke nodded and came to the next point on the agenda.

"Nothing I can do for you, is there?"

It was a puzzling question: "Thanks," Howard said, "No, I don't think so. How, exactly?"

"I just thought there might be. I've always felt that I owed you something and time's short and one values the chance to repay." He wore his courteous frown.

"But you owe me nothing, Brooke. I still don't know why you should be grateful for that rather boorish performance; and I never knew you were, until now. Why?"

Brooke opened a long thin cigarette-case, took out a cigarette, shielded the flame of the lighter carefully and looked over his cupped hand: "You just put the reason into words, when you said that Harriette took trouble with you."

"I don't get it."

"It happens to be the only occasion in my life when anybody's taken trouble with me; for me."

"I can't believe that."

"Please. I'm not saying it wistfully. I'm not saying I ever wanted people to do it, or needed them to do it. I'm endowed with an excess of independence and my life has been almost entirely free from obligations. That's why the one time remains important. Shall we go? I want to look at a place on the road. I'd forgotten it; we passed it." His stride was hurried now.

"What place?"

"Show you," Brooke said. "We could stop there and take a drink. You don't drink in the middle of the day; nor do I; so that evens things out."

'We were young, we were foolish, we were very very wise: and the door stood open at our feast.' "

His rapid change of gear from solemnity to silliness was bewildering. Then he watched the road, sitting forward with his chin on his knuckles. "Here," he said.

It was one of the small hotels built between the road and the sea; a pink cake of a building set among the pines, with the red rock bay curving below. The legend on the blue board read: "*Hotel St. Antoine; ouvert toute l'année; plage privée; tout confort.*"

"It's a nice place," Howard said. "They've done a lot to it since the war."

He followed Brooke into the bar that faced upon the

water; a glass box ablaze with sun, filled with the trumpeting crackle of the radio. Brooke, murmuring "*Permettez?*" to the barman, turned off the radio. "See how surprised he looks, Howard? That is the most unnatural action that the human animal can perform."

"I know it."

"Harriette hated me for asking her to turn it off last night, didn't she?"

"Of course not. She just thought you'd like to hear the news."

Brooke laughed. "Bless her. The one thing I don't want to hear this week is the news."

"Whatever happens?"

"Whatever happens."

"Not sure," said Howard, "that if I were you, I could detach myself so completely."

"Oh yes, you could." He stared down at the red rocks and the breaking surf. "The pool has grown up," he said. "There wasn't any diving-board; none of those highly civilised steps and concrete flats on which to arrange mattresses before arranging yourselves. Just a beach, *au naturel*."

He twitched his neat eyebrows and grinned, waiting for Howard to ask the question. "And of course," he said—"This bar wasn't here. It was a rather humble little dining-room. What'll you have? Our lack of needs is saddening the barman."

"Oh, a Cinzano, I guess. Break with tradition."

"I won't tell Harriette." He ordered two Cinzanos. "It isn't often," he said, "that I've allowed myself *la recherche du temps perdu*."

"That's what this whole trip of yours is about, isn't it?" Howard said abruptly.

"Why do you think so?"

"I began to think so when we were driving in from the airport."

"Childhood. Honeymoon. Haunted ground," said Brooke. "Not the purpose of the trip, though it makes an agreeable frame."

"Frame for what?"

Brooke smiled, as though this were an unnecessary question. He said nothing.

"Which is this place? Childhood or honeymoon?"

"Honeymoon."

"I thought it might be."

Brooke frowned. "And yet I don't want to hear from you how she was, how she looked, what she said . . . is that an unnatural reaction?" he asked innocently.

"I wouldn't know." All the questions he had ever asked himself about Brooke's marriage were coming into line; a whole row of skittles waiting to be knocked down. He asked the only question to which he knew the answer. "Was there ever anybody else?"

"For me? Oh, never," said Brooke light-heartedly. "Just the usual series of temporary excursions; the briefest and silliest." He turned his glass in his hand.

"And as far as the original situation went, I've only myself to blame; which is somehow consoling."

"You blame *yourself*?" Howard said.

"Yes."

"For heaven's sake, why?"

"Because a love so complete and intense is an impossible thing to live with. Understand?"

"No."

"If it's based on bed."

"But it should be."

"For both. Equally for both."

How like you, Howard thought, to believe that her natural turn for infidelity was due to an excess of enthusiasm on your side. He was back again at the problem of Brooke's innocence.

"Most of my friends," he said, "spend their lives rationa-

lising their own behaviour. You're the first one I ever heard trying to rationalise somebody else's. Ines just wasn't a stayer and that's all there is to it. Sorry: I won't talk about her if you'd rather I didn't."

"I don't mind at all. I have my version of her. You have yours. Did you know she came back?"

"Came back?"

"To me. Eighteen months afterwards."

"After the divorce?"

"No. After she left me the first time."

"I didn't know that. I know awfully little about any of it."

"That took courage, you know; to try again."

("Meaning that she'd got tired of the next one—or two, and knew where she'd be given gentle treatment as well as adequate pocket-money.")

"No," said Brooke, "I know what you're thinking; but it doesn't happen to be true. And in my mind, it's tolerably easy to say you're sorry to God for a sin that you've committed, but infinitely harder to say it to the person you've sinned against."

Diverted, Howard said, "I didn't know you were religious. I'd like to be."

"I was brought up like that. The attitude of mind doesn't change. The philosophy stays." He blinked at the sun. "I'll always remember when she came back. I'd still kept the house in Virginia; did you ever come to that house? No; somehow I thought you did. I loved it; Ines was never fond of it. White house set back in the trees. North House . . ." He lapsed into silence. After a time he looked up, his eyes oddly clouded.

"What was I saying?"

"Talking about when she came back."

"Oh yes. She? Valdes?"

"Ines," said Howard, bewildered.

"Ines, of course. I'm sorry. I was a long way off." He

rubbed the palm of his hand upward across his forehead. "Yes, the day she came back.

"It was spring; it was evening. I'd driven out from Washington before dinner. I'd become so used to being there alone that it hardly hurt any more. I couldn't really believe that there ever had been a time when I wasn't alone. And I walked through the house into the garden; and she was standing there." He smiled: "I repeat, it took courage."

"Well—yes," said Howard uncomfortably. "But what's the good of gestures if they don't come to anything?"

"There you raise two points and I disagree with both. I appreciate gestures and I can't bring myself to judge by results. That moment was a moment of great happiness; and the year that we spent together after it wasn't wasted."

"And at the end of the year?"

"We had to decide that it was impossible."

("Meaning she did.")

"Well—but: you said you'd grown so used to being alone that it hardly hurt. Wouldn't you rather that she'd left you in peace; instead of starting up the whole thing again—only to quit a second time?"

"I don't know. I've thought so on occasion, but taking a long-term view, I'm sure not. I'll always be grateful for certain memories."

"I should think it needed a great deal of self-discipline not to let them turn sour."

"Oh no," said Brooke.

"If it had happened to me, I wouldn't want to remember; even the good moments."

"But that would be foolish. That would be like ignoring the existence of a credit-balance in the bank."

"Your philosophy," said Howard, "is way ahead of mine." It was not precisely the thought in his mind. The thought was, "I believe that you are nearer to a Saint than anybody I ever met. And if it is true that the Saint alone can wholly love and understand the Sinner, well—that would be

the explanation of you and Ines, wouldn't it?" Brooke said without looking at his watch. "We ought to be going. It's a quarter to one."

"How do you know the time like that? You're right, but how do you know?"

"Comes from years of trying to do more in one day than is humanly possible," said Brooke with a grin.

He lost his talkative mood on the way home. Throughout lunch, Howard was aware of the atmosphere that Harriette had described as the "glass screen"; as soon as the coffee was on the table, he said, "Do you mind if I take it into the river-room? I have to work."

"Of course. Serge will take it in for you. Your Dr. Lodge is coming at five, did you remember?"

"Oh, yes. Thank you, Harriette. See you later." He went with his hurried stride.

"Oh, Brooke——"

"Yes?" he said at the door.

"What about the reporters?"

"What about them?"

"They're going to call up again this afternoon. All three of them."

"Just say I'm not making any statements; or giving any interviews. They ought to know that. Thank you."

"I cannot imagine," said Harriette, "why I ever thought that he had good manners."

Howard was silent, finding suddenly that he could not discuss Brooke with her any more.

"Don't you think he's acting very queerly?"

"No."

"Well, but—it's so contradictory. To want to go to the Casino; show himself off; invite attention; and then refuse to talk to the press; and expect me——"

—"Tell you what," said Howard. "I think it's warm enough to sit in the sun and finish my thriller."

III

HE looked up from the last pages of the thriller. He was aware of invasion. It had been inevitable that this should happen sooner or later, but it had happened sooner. The voices screaming "Darling" on the other side of the house, and then the runnel of people coming through on to the terrace. They were subject to the usual multiplication, the aura of unexpected guests, making the three of them seem like six. The impact of faces, limbs, clothes and words was excessive in its violence; a shock to the system after two hours of quiet. He rose, dazedly welcoming. He wondered what to do about Brooke; whether they knew that he was here. He found that he could not imagine Brooke's reaction to these people.

There was Tatiana. There was too much of Tatiana. She was lavish in design and colour; the ripened beauty whose curves had become hills and valleys, who obstructed the view with her ponderous loveliness, her loud laughter, her glow of a blonde sunset. Tatiana's jewellery was to scale; one of the huge, semi-precious ear-rings always fell off; the signal for a shriek like an air-raid siren and a rescuing dive from Lucas.

There was Lucas; there was always Lucas; with his limpid pre-Raphaelite look and his especial brand of hay-fever that went on all the year round, necessitating the little atomiser that he flourished as though it were a snuff-box. To-day Lucas was in full cry with an anxiety-neurosis. Last night an old friend of his mother's had greeted him in the most *extraordinary* manner at the Château de Madrid; not that she *said* anything, but she *exuded* coldness. "Like central heating in reverse. I can't *think* what I've done."

There was the Baroness, small, dark and luminous; the international expert with the bedside manner. She had

written *I Was There* in 1938; *I Heard It Happen* in 1939; *I Came Out Alive* in 1940; and the Lord knew how many more since. The thorough German mind lived in an excitable little body and it was perhaps this fusion by which she contrived to be at once lush and prim.

Howard knew that he only wanted to be away. He did not want them off this terrace; they belonged to it; he might have planned it for them. In his mind he made them a present of the striped awnings, the cocktail wagon, the blue and white garden chairs; ("Lovely and sheltered you are here. Just like summer.") "All yours," he told them inwardly, "just so's I can be somewhere else."

The process of settling took about fifteen minutes. At the end of that time, Tatiana's sun-glasses had been found; Lucas had come out of his sneezing fit; the Baroness had given Harriette the address of the specialist. Important decisions had been taken: which chair; which drink; whether one needed a rug over one's knees; whether to sit in the sun or in the shade. (This was especially momentous for Lucas, whose symptoms could recur in either.) Now the talk, the authentic language of the crowd.

"Riddled with Communists he says simply riddled with Customs-men who found two thousand dollar notes sewn inside her garter belt so they passed the bank and it ran fifteen hundred which is nothing if you look at it with the exchange as I heard it last month from Washington and it is not so much massage as a steady, rhythmic re-shaping of the time I said I'd drop it on them I really would have dropped it on them a year ago I would have dropped a *mille* on Zero and it came up to the moment I assure you the Russians have the secret of her method is relaxing the tension of the stomach-muscles so that one finds one's own morality-level as a result of these absurd currency regulations so much healthier I mean one has always had it about sex with a perfect line over the hips smooth and close-fitting."

Never before had he watched them with so steady an eye, never sat apart in his own mind for so long, scanning the present and finding it so small.

"You're very quiet to-day," Tatiana said; "is that the result of the dull friends?"

"When did I ever say I found you dull?"

"My God, not us. The friends you had to dinner last night."

There were moments, Howard had long ago observed, when Harriette could kick him under the table even if she were sitting three yards away from him and there was no table. It was a gift. He said, "Yeah, that was terrible," and tried to see from Harriette's manner whether she intended to unveil Brooke to-day. She was following up quickly: "The original bores. The archetypal bores." The word Archetypal was one of her more recent discoveries.

"I'd rather be anything than bored, except sick," said Lucas seriously.

"I have never been bored in my life," said the Baroness.

"I'm always bored in the mornings," said Tatiana, "Everything seems to be going on for hours and hours and hours until lunchtime."

"Oh my darling," said the Baroness, "if you were at your typewriter by half-past eight as I am."

"What the devil should I be doing at a typewriter at half-past-eight when I can't type?" said Tatiana.

"A *figurative* typewriter," said Lucas.

"If you please, Mrs. Rey, Miss Bolton is here to see you," Serge interrupted.

"I call that a coincidence," said Harriette, "and I collect coincidences."

"Why is it a coincidence?"

"Because Miss Bolton is a typist."

"Even so, it lacks drama," said Lucas peevishly.

"I'll see her," Howard said. Harriette said to the others, "Excuse me one minute," and caught up with him inside

the french-windows. "What d'you think? Would he like to come out and say Hello?"

"I very much doubt it."

"Why? Well, never mind. Do I tell them he's here?"

"Up to you. I'd say not."

"Well, but—it's five o'clock now. Merritt Lodge will turn up at any minute."

"So?"

"D'you imagine I want them to think I'd ask Merritt Lodge to this house?"

"Oh, figure it out for yourself, darling. If it's so complex you'd better station Serge at the gate and have him smuggle Merritt Lodge straight into the river-room. I don't care."

She gave him a look of genuine wife-to-husband hatred. "Don't forget," she said icily, "that Millie Bolton doesn't know whose typescript this is."

"How about my getting into some kind of disguise myself? Used to be a false moustache around somewhere."

She whisked away. He found Millie Bolton waiting in his little office at the back of the hall. He was cross with Serge for putting her there; there was no point in being cross with Serge; Harriette had trained him.

"Hello, Millie; so sorry to keep you waiting," he said. She affected him as any colourlessly unattractive young woman affected him; with a yearning of pity, covered at once by a hearty, flirtatious manner which he despised.

"That's all right Mr. Rey."

She looked different; livelier, as though she had a secret.

"You got it done, eh?"

"Yes. Here it is. Three copies in this envelope and the original in that one." She handed them to him, stood back, smiling expectantly.

"Well, thanks a lot. I'll give them to——" he paused.

She said, "Have you read it?"

"No," said Howard.

"Oh, well. I won't ask any questions. But—well—

it's unfinished, you know. Is there any more for me to do?"

"There may be. I'll find out, if you'll excuse me a moment. And then you're going to join us for a little drink on the terrace, aren't you?"

"That would be ever so nice."

As Howard walked down the hall to the river-room he heard the sound of the piano. It was the same melody, with the deluding echo of Bach; the island tune. He knocked on the door. The music stopped. Brooke opened the door to him as he had opened it on Thursday night. He stood there silently. His face was pale and the furrow between his brows looked as though it had been made with a black pencil.

"Oh . . . yes," he said at last.

"I'm awfully sorry to disturb you."

"Please——" Brooke said. He glanced over his shoulder, down the perspective of the long room, as though asking permission for Howard to enter. When the door was shut, Howard thought that the room felt queer today. That waiting atmosphere that came when you opened the archway door upon the dais was stronger; and the room was surprisingly shadowy after the sunlight on the terrace. Cold, too.

"Are you warm enough in here?" he asked.

Brooke nodded. He had been writing. The refectory table was strewn with sheets of foolscap.

"The typist just brought this for you."

"Thanks." He looked at the envelopes as though he did not know what they were.

"Maybe you'd like to check it over with her, while she's here?"

"Oh no," Brooke said. "No, thank you very much." He put the envelopes on one of the black chairs. He shook his shoulders; he seemed to be making a violent effort in concentration.

"Did you say that somebody wanted to see me?"

"Not if you don't want to see her. Just the typist."

Brooke came a little way out of his dream. "She'd like to be paid, wouldn't she? Here; give her this." He opened his wallet and took out a hundred-dollar note.

"Are you crazy? It won't be anything like that. Anyway I don't imagine for a minute that she's brought a bill. She seemed to think you'd have some more work for her."

"Not yet, no. Tell her, will you? It's a little more difficult now." He smiled. "From now on, you see, the story belongs to Valdes."

"Valdes?"

"You don't know the name?" Brooke asked, with laughter in his eyes, as though it were absurd that Howard should not.

"Well, you said it this morning, didn't you? By mistake——"

"By mistake? It wasn't by mistake," Brooke said gently.

"Yes, it was. We were talking about Ines."

He met a faint, uncomprehending smile. Seldom conscious of possessing a nervous system, he felt now as though his body were being wired all over by a singularly brutal electrician.

"Listen," Brooke said, putting a hand on his shoulder, "I don't want you to be unjust to her in your mind. She hasn't failed; she can't; any more than the island can fail."

"Look here, Brooke; I don't know anything about this island of yours. And I don't know anybody called Valdes."

Brooke twisted a lock of his own hair between his fingers: the little smile was still on his mouth.

"No, but seriously," he said. "Time's short. We'll have the Trial upon us in a few days now. And it is important to be clear about these things. Justice, charity," he snapped his fingers; "all the things that one *says* one believes in; the automatic beliefs of the decent human being; when they're put to the test they aren't automatic; they're not easy; God knows I haven't found them easy." He walked slowly

back to the piano; he played the gay, solitary tune again. After a moment Howard moved towards the piano. "Has this in common with the sound of the water," Brooke said, "that there's no logical end of the phrase. When you come to there," he struck a chord, "you're back at the beginning again." The smile that he gave Howard was now infinitely friendly.

"Why do you look tortured and thunderous?" he asked.

"Because I don't understand. Because you worry me."

Suddenly he found himself wanting to think hard of the sunshiny terrace; the cocktail-wagon and the talk; of Tatiana's great gold head; Harriette wrapped in her white coat; Lucas wielding the atomiser and the Baroness stroking her ankles with her finger-tips. But they eluded him; he could not believe that they were there; in the same dimension as this room, where Brooke played the tune.

"Only tell me," he heard himself saying. "Tell me."

"What, for example?" Brooke had taken his hands from the keys.

"What is this island you talk about?"

"Leron," said Brooke patiently. "What other island could it be?"

"Where is it?"

"Where I am," said Brooke. "I'm there all the time now. You know that." He stroked his hands backward across his hair, clasped them there a moment; on the forehead the black furrow deepened; the eyes shut. Once again he appeared to make the effort in concentration, silent and painful.

(Along the hall, in the little office-room, Millie Bolton was waiting; nice ordinary Millie at whom he made verbal passes because he was sorry for her.)

"Brooke," he said softly.

There was no answer.

"Please, Brooke."

"Yes?" Brooke said, opening his eyes. "You want to go?"

"I must. You'll just stay here, won't you? till Merritt Lodge comes. We've got some boring visitors. You won't want to see them. And as far as the typist's concerned—I'll just tell her, you haven't anything for her yet." His spine felt chilled and he was surprised that his teeth did not chatter.

"No," said Brooke drowsily. "Tell her that, and thank her."

"You don't mind her knowing who you are? Or—does she know? Did you sign it?"

"Sign what? Oh, the Order in Council, yes," said Brooke, "I signed it—you saw me sign it, Peter."

"You'll—just stay there, won't you?" Howard said again at the door.

"But of course."

As he shut the door he heard the tune again. He stood alone, in the long hall. He moved away from the river-room door. He stood still again. He rubbed his hands together.

"It wasn't an act," he said to himself. "Don't try to fool yourself that it was. He meant every word of it. Brooke isn't having a nervous breakdown. It's worse than that."

When he tried to light a cigarette, his fingers jumped. He stood there patiently waiting for them to steady. Presently he got the lighter flame to the end of the cigarette, and the cigarette to stay still.

"And he's Brooke Alder and they'll have to know. Now, Henry Dickson ought to know to-night. I ought to call him. Don't be an idiot, Howard Rey; nothing that you feel for Brooke has the slightest importance in this. It's too serious. That wasn't just double-talk; that was hallucination; a whole raft of hallucinations. He didn't even know who I was. And hallucination is only another word for insanity."

Still hypnotised, he came to the main hall, paused outside the door of the little room where Millie waited; looking

on to the terrace where the mixed voices were sounding and the sun shone. He did not think that he could say a word to anybody. He could not imagine breaking the cold silence in his head; he felt as though somebody had filled his skull with cracked ice.

On the terrace now the little orchestra had changed its tune; there was a new theme, a pause and an upward beat, Harriette's voice crying, "Why, hello. So you came *that* way," and the voice managed to suggest that nobody had ever come through the archway on to the terrace before. He knew, without looking, that the visitor was Merritt Lodge.

IV

MERRITT LODGE was, as ever, prepared for the worst. Strolling in affably among Harriette Rey's guests, bowing over her hand, he was still aware of the little stone man who sat inside, saying: "And now we shall be told that Mr. Brooke Alder has been recalled to Washington on urgent matters of State."

He greeted the Baroness, who indulged her usual gesture, that began with a flutter of the eyelids, continued as a ripple of her small, prominent bosom and died out on an undulation of the hips. Politely, he skirted Tatiana, nodded to Lucas, turned back to his hostess and saw that she was not at ease. "May I offer you a drink before you and Howard have your little talk?" she asked him.

He said, "No, thank you. I don't drink. Very dull of me, isn't it?"

"Not at all," said the Baroness. "It is exceptionally wise. No great man ever drinks. I remember saying that to Schacht in '37."

Merritt followed Harriette Rey. He knew that she was

one of the people who disapproved; he watched her sunnily, vizor down.

"Dr. Lodge, I did *not* tell them. I thought that your visit might——"

"But it needn't," he said with all the sweetness that he could put into his voice. "After all, I'm retired from practice now. I am entitled to pay calls. Many people find me socially acceptable, you know."

It gave him exquisite pleasure to say this. Her eyelashes fluttered: "Even so," she said, "I thought it more tactful to tell them that you were here to discuss some business with Howard."

"Ah—and meanwhile you are keeping Brooke Alder incarcerated? I understand that he was at large yesterday."

"There's no question of incarcerating him. He happens to be working in the river-room."

"Working? I thought he was here to rest."

"He writes a great deal. I'll show you to the room. Oh, Howard, there you are."

Howard Rey looked very queer, Merritt thought; like a man with a bad hangover. He said, "Hello, Dr. Lodge—I'm—I'm awfully glad to see you." His hand felt cold.

"You have met Brooke Alder, haven't you?" Harriette was asking.

"Yes, I have. With Henry in Paris." He was careful to omit the Ambassador's surname. "Well, Howard," Harriette said a little impatiently, "you'll take Dr. Lodge to the river-room?" Rey continued to look as though somebody had hit him on the head. He said "Yes, of course. But there's Millie Bolton; she's been waiting. Take her out and give her a drink, will you, darling? Excuse me, Mr. Lodge." He led the way down the long hall; he halted half-way. "Look, I have to say this; I'm most damnably worried about Brooke. I just left him. Henry Dickson ought to be told at once."

Merritt raised his eyebrows.

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"Harriette doesn't know anything about it," Rey said.

"About what?"

"Well, you'll see." He spread out his hands. "I just don't know. If it is a nervous breakdown——" He stopped.

"Suppose——" said Merritt with a purr, "that you let me see what I think it is. And we'll talk afterwards."

"Yes . . . that's right. I'm sorry." He knocked on the door.

After that there was the voice calling "Come in" and Brooke Alder advancing to meet them. He said "Hello, Dr. Lodge, I thought it might be you."

It was a long time since Merritt had seen him in the flesh; he had forgotten how well-built and tough the flesh was. On the face that launched a thousand press-photographs there was not the set look that those photographs recorded; there was a wide, friendly smile.

"Here? Or would you rather go to my room?" Brooke asked, smiling down at him. (The doom of looking up at tall men.)

"Here will do splendidly. What a beautiful room this is." He was aware of Howard's perplexity at his back; then Howard excused himself and went. Brooke Alder, with a host's gesture, waved him to a chair.

"I hope," Merritt said, "that you don't look upon this as an intrusion. I promised Henry Dickson that I'd keep an eye on you."

"I know you did." He sat down opposite Merritt in one of the black carved chairs; he held out his cigarette-case. "Thanks; I don't. None of the harmless vices," Merritt murmured. He had his line of approach neatly charted: "Now, as Henry probably told you, I retired some years ago. So you needn't look upon me as the usual medical dictator."

"Thank you; I won't." He lit his own cigarette and leaned back. ("A little too much show of ease perhaps? Or wouldn't I think that if Rey had said nothing?")

"What can I tell you, Dr. Lodge?"

"Well, the first thing I'd like to know is how long a rest you're planning. According to Henry, you were emphatic that it should only be a week."

"I'd like to make it a little more, now."

"Good. And not the answer I expected. People like yourself are usually bad at resting. Do you find you're sleeping better here? Henry said that you were troubled with insomnia."

"I was. That's going. It always does with me. I'm not naturally a bad sleeper; and the moment I turn off the strain, whatever the strain is, I can sleep like a kitten."

"Unusual, too," said Merritt.

"Simple mechanism," said Brooke.

"What was the feeling, precisely?"

"The feeling?"

"The feeling that you told Henry was beginning to wear you down?"

"That? Oh—just the world feeling," said Brooke lightly.

"When I'm very tired, it's pure Wordsworth."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Too much with us, late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers"

Brooke quoted softly.

"Ah," said Merritt, who did not read poetry.

"Nothing very interesting about it," Brooke said, "I imagine that one person out of three is suffering from it now. In a world becoming less habitable every year."

"I imagine that somebody in your position must feel that very acutely."

"No more acutely than Joe Doakes does in his back yard."

"May I be pompous and say that you owe it to Joe Doakes in his back yard to take good care of yourself?"

Brooke Alder smiled at him and said nothing. Merritt

glanced at the scattered paper on the refectory table.

"Mrs. Rey tells me you're writing while you're here."

"And now you see it for yourself."

"Memoirs?"

"God forbid."

"Why not?"

"It isn't the sort of exercise that I should enjoy. I have too good a verbal memory."

"I'd never have thought of that as a disadvantage."

"It has many disadvantages."

"Such as?"

"The anti-social side," said Brooke. "You recall exactly what somebody said to you in '43 and he gives you quite a different version in '51. There you sit, with the choice between keeping a gentlemanly silence or demonstrating yourself as an inquisitorial adding-machine."

"I see that. Particularly in your job."

"Then," said Brooke, "there's the inability to forget what you yourself have said. Know that one?"

"Yes. I know that one. Self-reproach. A most uncomfortable emotion, I believe," Merritt said, making the mask smile agreeably.

Brooke's expression was tolerant and instructive. "Not self-reproach, no. You can't reproach a self who has ceased to be. You just find that you've unconsciously kept him for the record when you'd prefer to have thrown him away. That's all it amounts to."

"He'd be useful for a memoir, though, wouldn't he?"

"Possibly."

"Am I allowed to ask what it is you are writing?"

"Sorry, no. It's of no interest to anyone but myself."

"All right. But you propose to stay here until you finish it?"

"I didn't say so."

"No; that was my own intelligent guess," said Merritt. "Now, I'd like, if I may, to check you over on all the

routine things, pulse, heart, blood-pressure and so on. No hurry. If you could find the time to look in one day this week?"

"Certainly."

"And there's nothing else that you feel you'd like to tell me."

"No, thank you. Nothing at all."

"Then I won't detain you."

"Kind of you to come," said Brooke. "Sorry to turn out so disappointingly well." He rose.

("Even if I don't find whatever it was that scared Rey, I've seldom been more acutely aware of a bluff. He's less strained now than he was when we began to talk, but he's worn that watchful look more than once, a look I know well. This may be quite interesting.") Brooke came to the door with him: "Would you tell Harriette I'll be out in a few minutes? I just have to tidy up here."

As he went down the long hall, Merritt made his decision. Whatever Rey had to tell him, Rey must understand that he, Merritt Lodge, was in authority. No panic call from Rey to Henry Dickson could be allowed. "And," he said to himself, "you'll best reassure Rey by a show of omniscience. Even if it means cutting him short on some information that you'd like to have. You'll get it sooner or later." He was smiling. A nursery-rhyme couplet had danced suddenly into memory:

"One, two, three, four, five,
Once I caught a fish alive——"

He was still smiling when Howard met him in the main hall.

Howard said without preliminary, "I put a call through to the Ambassador. Knew you'd approve."

Merritt stiffened.

"I couldn't do anything else, could I?" Howard persisted.

"You've spoken to Henry?"

"Not yet. I'm waiting for the call to come through. He'll be glad to know you're here. Maybe you'd like to talk to him."

"I certainly would, Mr. Rey. Forgive my saying that I'm the person who should talk to him."

"Oh—yes—all right," said Howard vaguely. The telephone rang. Serge said, "Paris on the line, M'sieur."

"I'll take it in my office," said Howard. Merritt followed him. He stretched out a masterful hand as soon as Howard began to speak. "And here's Dr. Lodge," Howard ended lamely.

He heard Henry Dickson's voice. "Hello, Merritt. What's the news?"

"None, yet," said Merritt cheerfully. "One satisfactory thing is that he's prepared to stay on here over the week; which gives me just the time I need. He's very friendly, and that of course is a great help."

"Yes, indeed. God bless you. Would you say there's no cause for serious worry?"

Merritt hesitated. "In all honesty, I can't tell you yet. There are certain disquieting features, but I'm perfectly familiar with them in cases of severe nervous strain; and I've seen them disappear completely. And I've also seen the exact opposite. It's too early to know. He's resting nicely here; and he's under the best possible auspices. So—if you'll make that report—ah—higher up, I'll call you in a few days. Please get in touch with me if you feel it necessary. Not a bit, Henry. I'm very glad to be of assistance. Good-bye."

He saw the dazed look on Howard's face. Howard was sitting on his own desk, with a drawing-board below his haunches.

"I hope that reassures you a little, Mr. Rey."

"You mean——"

"I mean what I said to the Ambassador. And I want

Brooke Alder to stay here, do what he likes, rest, amuse himself. Have you any idea what he's writing, by the way?"

"N—no. He said he had to keep a record. But look here, Dr. Lodge——"

"A record? I'd like to know what kind of record. Think you could find out for me?"

"I don't know——" Howard rested his large, buff-coloured head between his hands: "I just can't figure . . . Was he making sense just now?"

"Ah—up to a point, yes. But remember that I'm very much more at home with this kind of situation than you are."

"He wasn't having, well, hallucinations?"

Merritt chuckled. "Even I wouldn't venture to diagnose hallucinations in twenty minutes, Mr. Rey. One learns to go carefully." The fact that Howard was sitting enabled him to put an easy hand on Howard's shoulder. "The best way that you can help me, and help Brooke Alder, is to do as I've said: let him alone; let him see people if he feels like seeing them."

"But, hell——" Howard interrupted, "he couldn't see anybody as he was half an hour ago without their writing him off as a lunatic."

Merritt gave the shoulder a soothing pat: "I've seen many phases of acute anxiety that would lead the layman to call the patient certifiable. Suppose you stop worrying. The responsibility's with me and not with you. All I ask is your co-operation."

The cold evening air had driven the party off the terrace. The orchestra prolonged the theme of "Good-bye Darling" and Merritt, standing a little apart, devoted himself to a snapshot-study of Harriette Rey.

Though he never glanced at the fashion-plates in the shiny, expensive magazines, he knew that the silhouette of her clothes would be the silhouette forecast and recommended on those pages. He saw women of her sort as striving women; women for ever in competition, for ever

trying to catch up, to get ahead; never in repose with achievement nor content in the lack of achievement. The pretty lizard face was poised in perpetual thrust; all the movements of the body were quick and co-ordinated. ("The feminine counterpart of the business-man. He's an express train without a terminus and so, in her way, is she. Sit down, dear Mrs. Rey; sit down; and even when you are seated, I can hear the rattle of your wheels.")

They were in the big, over-elaborate living-room. Serge had put the Cape Cod lighter under the logs and the fire blazed. The drab little Miss Bolton was saying good-bye.

"I must go too," Merritt said and waited until she had gone. Howard, a large blond image of perplexity, stood before the fire. Merritt turned to Harriette: "Brooke Alder asked me to tell you that he'd be out in a few minutes. He's just tidying up his papers. Have you any idea what he's writing? He tells me it's of no interest except to himself, but I must admit that it inspires my curiosity."

For the first time she looked friendly. "Mine, too. I'd just love to know." ("Hard, those eyes; don't believe she likes Brooke. It's just possible, despite her Puritan memory, that she'll co-operate with me rather better than Rey will.")

"Surely he'll tell *you*, Dr. Lodge. And if he does, will you short-cut a neurosis for me by telling me?"

"That's a two-way bargain, don't forget."

"Of course," Harriette Rey said. "You could always ask Millie Bolton. She types it."

"My urgency isn't quite as ruthless as that, Mrs. Rey." ("But I rather think that yours might be.")

V

MILLIE BOLTON found that her head was buzzing amiably from two of Mrs. Rey's Dry Martinis. She lingered on the

bridge beyond the courtyard; she liked to stand here watching the waterfall splash down the hillside. Its noise was clamorous and gay. The sunset coloured it; the sunset made the yellow tones of the house a richer yellow, laid violet shadows in the courtyard. A man crossed the courtyard and stood at the gate; he too cast a violet shadow. He shaded his eyes against the dazzle of lances that the sunset was thrusting through the trees.

"Good-evening," he said.

"Good-evening," said Millie.

He strolled towards her; she had seen him before many times: the black hair dashed with grey, the neat brows with the furrow between, the light eyes and the broad smile. (When you see a face that's always in the newspapers, Millie thought, it makes you rather pleased with yourself, I don't know why. Fancy his being here.)

"Beautiful, isn't it?" said Brooke Alder.

"It's lovely, I always love this side of the house." (I wonder if I ought to say I know who he is.) "I mean, the other's more showy, the terrace and the view, but this has a special charm of its own. A lot of people tell Mrs. Rey they can't stand the noise of the river."

"They prefer their own noises? I heard some of them just now. I am sorry," he said, "that is rude to your friends."

"It's quite all right. They're not my friends. I just came up here with some typing. Oh . . ." she stopped.

"Yes, you're right. It was mine," said Brooke Alder.

"I guessed," said Millie, as startled as though she had backed the right number at roulette.

"Thank you very much for typing it. Mayn't I settle for that now?" She was embarrassed; she said, "Oh no; don't; I don't know how much. Please——" He was drawing out notes from his wallet; slowly he returned them.

"As you like, of course. I'll have some more for you in a

day or two. Where do I find you? As far as I'm concerned, Harriette conjured you out of a hat."

"I work with American Travel. And I'm on the phone at home too. I've got a card here." She was grateful to the two Martinis for the steadiness of her hand as she gave it to him.

"Thank you. I'll call you as soon as it's ready. My name's Brooke Alder."

"Yes, I know. I recognised you. I—I like it very much."

"What? My name?" he asked, grinning more than ever.

"I meant your story. It's fascinating. It's——" she fumbled for words. "It's not like anything I've ever read."

"No; I don't suppose it is," he said absently, as though his mind had gone straying off: "Nobody's written it down before and I haven't had time until now. You can't really write about Leron when you're away from it; that's the queer thing."

"You mean when you're busy dashing about all over the world?" she said confidently.

"Yes. One has to be quiet to get back there."

"Is it—is it the first novel you've ever written?"

He laughed. "Bless you," he said, "this isn't a novel. It's the truth."

VI

WHEN the alarm clock rang beside Millie Bolton's bed on Tuesday morning, she thought, "It's going to be today. I know it is."

She had played it all through in her head as she wanted it to be; she played it again. She would look up suddenly from her typewriter behind the little counter at the back of the office; she would see him coming in through the glass

door from the Croisette. He would say Good-morning to Mr. Fitch, august Mr. Fitch who sat at the first table inside the door; and Mr. Fitch would recognise him. Mr. Fitch's eyes would pop and he would leap to his feet, but by that time Brooke Alder would have gone past him, past young Joe Sladen's table, while Joe Sladen's crew-cut head was turning and Joe's short-sighted eyes blinking behind their glasses; now Brooke Alder was standing at the counter.

She had put into his mouth the words, "Good morning. You're the person I'm looking for," and because they would not be able to talk there, Brooke Alder would suggest that they went next door to the Voile Bleue, to sit at one of the tables in the sun, drink coffee and look through the new section of the script.

And when Millie got to there in the game, she had to pause, to remind herself that Brooke Alder had, undoubtedly, been indulging in whimsy when he said, "It isn't a novel; it's the truth." She had liked the fanciful phrase: "One has to be quiet to get back to Leron." That was just the way that writers should think and talk. Whimsy was the speciality of writers and, in the cause of whimsy, there was nothing more natural than to protest that one's fancies were real.

The nicest thing in this adventure was her sense of privilege. It was just possible that the Reys knew about the novel. It was obvious that the world did not. Small paragraphs now common to the *Nice-Matin*, the *Continental Daily Mail* and the *Herald Tribune* were baffled for facts. (Mr. Brooke Alder was taking a brief holiday on the coast; Mr. Brooke Alder was resting at a friend's villa; Mr. Brooke Alder was spending a few days in relaxation after the Paris Conference. They took more or less time to say this but it was in essence all that they said. The paragraphs, Millie thought, had the shrinking nature of spinach when boiled down.) For two days it had been remarkably good fun to be Millie Bolton.

She drove along the sea-road. Rain had fallen in the night, but the horizon was clear. A silver light lay on the sea and the mist was smoking off the Esterel range. In another half-hour the sun would shine. Millie parked the blue tin beetle beside the palm tree, looked up at the mimosa, thought of the London buses, said her usual brief "Thank you", the morning prayer to the God with the city solicitor's face, and crossed the road.

He could, of course, do it differently. It would be just as impressive if Joe Sladen answered the telephone and turned to say in an awed voice, "Millie, Brooke Alder's asking for you." Or a letter in that remarkable handwriting would serve.

("Dear Miss Bolton:

The script is ready, I should like to talk to you about it.")

And there was another way; returning from lunch to find the message: "Mr. Brooke Alder would like you to call him immediately."

She opened the glass door. The time was twenty minutes to nine. Of the staff, the only person already present was Monsieur Broussard, behind the banking-counter. Brooke Alder was standing in front of the rack that held the brightly coloured travel-folders, studying them with apparent attention. "Hello," he said, "I'm afraid I'm a little early."

His impact was more frivolous than it had been at the first encounter; perhaps because of his clothes. He wore a bright blue sports jacket, dark blue flannels, a blue shirt open at the neck. There was a truant's look on his face; a gay and guilty look, as though he had escaped lawful captors; a theory which he disproved at once by saying, "Howard Rey was going over to Antibes, so he dropped me here."

It was too sudden. It was too early in the morning. She was caught unawares in the kind of nervousness that made her thoughts collide and telescope, so that she skipped the

words she meant to say. "Good morning; have you got some more work for me?" was the best that she could do.

"Plenty," said Brooke Alder, tapping the parcel under his arm.

"Oh, good," said Millie fatuously.

"May we talk for a minute?"

"Yes, of course."

"Where?"

Now none of her sentences would begin or finish. "The restaurant next door. Don't know if you'd like coffee or something it's. They'll all be coming in and."

"Let us do that."

As they went out she looked anxiously to right and left, but neither Mr. Fitch nor Joe Sladen was yet in sight. Now they were safely inside the doors of the restaurant; surrounded by an acreage of empty tables. The one waiter on duty was dusting the chairs.

"By the window?" Brooke Alder said.

"That would be nice."

He moved into his place opposite hers, putting the parcel of manuscript on the cloth between them. He leaned back, folding his arms. Still he wore the truant look.

"I thought we'd better have a word about it all," he said, "while there's time."

"Yes, Mr. Alder."

"You won't find any difficulty with this," he laid his hand on the parcel. "I took it down as told to me; it's quite straightforward. After that; well—" he smiled at her. "I'm not sure yet. We'll have to await events."

"World events?" Millie hazarded.

"No, no. Island events."

"You mean—you yourself don't know what's going to happen next?"

He watched her steadily. "Nobody does," he said. "But my feeling is that I'd like you to be on the spot. The veil is getting thinner every day and I'm not sure, once the decision

about the Trial's made, how often I can be sure of coming back."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Alder, but I don't understand."

"Even if you don't," said Brooke, "I'm inclined to pin my hopes on you."

The waiter set the two café-filtres in front of them.

"I—it's," she burred again.

"There isn't anybody else, you see. Howard Rey, I'd thought. But Howard fails; he must, he's been in the world too long. And Harriette—need I say more? It's important, by the way, that she doesn't read this." He touched the script again. "I think she's after it. And it's roused the curiosity of the man in the mask."

"The—the man in the mask?"

"The Doctor," said Brooke. "He'd like to know. They'd all like to know."

"Know what, Mr. Alder?"

He ignored the question. "Of course the island isn't an easy place to understand; I grant you that." He set his chin on his hand, staring at the sugar-bowl. "Take the prolongation of life, for example. I don't suppose that the world realises yet why, having found the prescription, we treated it as we did."

"And how was that?" Millie asked primly.

"We made it the punishment for murder," said Brooke; "that was centuries before my time, of course." He added, "In the world you'll still find people who want to go on living for hundreds of years. Not on Leron. At first—after the decree—murders were only committed by the very young or the very old. The very young couldn't see far enough ahead and the very old didn't mind the idea of a reprieve. But there hasn't been a murder on Leron in my lifetime. Imagine," he said to her, "living on and on; with your family and your friends long dead; nobody to whom you could say 'Do you remember'? And of course the formula, like all scientists' formulae, has a flaw. It can't

keep your body young, really young. God is still a long way ahead of Gerlach."

"Who is Gerlach?"

Brooke Alder said, "There's always been a Gerlach at Station X. He's a German scientist. Now that's a tradition, a skill, that can't be handed down to humanity's advantage. I don't know why not. But we've proved it. No matter how a scientist works, where his researches lead him, sooner or later he uncovers something that creates a sinister problem. By all the odds, Gerlach is about to land us with another one. When we've weathered the Trial, we shall see."

The sun had come out; it glowed through the white muslin curtains at the windows, beside his head. Millie Bolton, of Putney and the rue de la République, watched Brooke Alder thinking.

"I don't believe," he said, "that any scientific or mechanical skill is adequate exercise for the human faculties. You see that at the Mine; the men who work on the towers; particularly the man who sets the pace; the man on the wheel of the control-tower. Orrey, his name is. Orrey's shift is five hours out of the twenty-four. The precise touch of those fingers on that wheel can determine the whole output from the Lake. It's a family skill again; Grandfather Orrey and Great-Grandfather Orrey did the same. It hasn't occurred to anybody to invent a machine that turns the wheel. Orrey does as his father did; has five hours alone up there; eight hours for sleep; eleven hours for recreation. I am not in the least surprised by what happened to Orrey. I understand Orrey," he said, "I understand all of them—and that includes Julian—I have to."

All this time, she thought, she had been looking into his eyes. If she could stop doing that, could get away from the blue shining eyes, she would be able to challenge him; to say "None of this is true. You can't make me believe that it's true".

It was an effort to look away and as soon as she had looked away, she thought that he understood what she was trying to do. As she turned her head and stared frantically at a little vase of mimosa and carnations on the next table, she heard him chuckle.

"Are you still trying to believe that I'm writing a novel, Miss Bolton? Yes, you are. All right. Forget the scientists and the Mine; the sources of fear. The island, besides its odd history, has a really astonishing beauty."

("Now you can say it; go on; say it, say 'None of this is true'.")

"It's full of contradictions," Brooke said, "Geographical contradictions, but they somehow balance. They make whatever you need at the moment that you need it. On a hot day, one of those blazing days, south of the Capital, you can look at the peak of White Wall and feel cooled because it is there. And if you've ever climbed the last slope of White Wall, you can stand knee-deep in snow and see, far south, the palms on Tropic Side."

His voice was slower; there was a singing note in it somewhere, she thought, a drowsy singing note as though he knew all this by heart.

"Where they drained the marshes in the east, there's a kind of mirage; as if the ghost of the old water still came up and covered it. And after that, going north, you'll see the coastline harden and grow more rugged till you reach the last town; the grey granite town above the seal-rocks. There's always a tremendous surf beating those rocks. Sometimes I find it hard to believe that this sea is the same element that touches the south shore; that very quiet silvered water, coming in endlessly, and the horizon going on for ever."

His voice ceased. It seemed a long time since they had come in through the doors of the restaurant; she was almost sleepy. Behind the little vase of flowers she saw for two seconds a mirage of white sand and long waves breaking.

She had been going to say something important; she could not remember what it was; she had turned her head away from him because she wanted to say it.

She said, "I'd like to go ashore on South-West Beach; in the early morning, the way that you did."

VII

"One, two, three, four, five,
Once I caught a fish alive."

MERRITT LODGE hummed to himself. It has become the Brooke Alder theme-song. He was making up his diary on Alder's case in the grandiose room that he called his study. He was happy today and the little stone man who sat inside had not said a word.

The first notes described in detail the events of last Saturday. On Sunday and Monday there was no entry. Tuesday's record began with a telephone call from Mrs. Rey.

9.15. Harriette R. in friendly mood. Thought I might like to know that B.A. had spent both days closeted in river-room, writing. Worked again after dinner Sunday night; last night honoured her table (sarcastic note in Mrs. R.'s voice) when she had friends there. Added that she had again asked B.A. about his work and drawn a blank.

12.30. B.A. here for check-up. Still signs of strain; physical condition good (see medical notes.) Made non-committal answer when asked after progress of work. Gave every indication of willingness to co-operate and still watched me all the time to see if it took. Gave himself another week in which "to recover normal energies". Promised to call me before end of week. Refused offer of sleeping-pills.

2.30 p.m. Called Ambassador. Understood that my name had been mentioned in message to President.

Wednesday 5.30 p.m. Interesting encounter with Howard Rey, met by chance at the Club. Rey definitely quieter in his mind about B.A., but far from confidential. Feel now that he's hostile, possibly because I took over when he was anxious to talk to H.D. Expressed the opinion that B.A.'s writing was purely B.A.'s own affair; most surprising after his panic on Saturday—spoke of his fondness for B.A. Think that the R's may have quarrelled on the whole issue.

Thursday 4.30 p.m. Telephone talk with Mrs. R. (calling from the Casino.) Her enthusiasm "on the trail" amuses me. Thought I'd like to know that B.A. left manuscript with typist at American Travel Office Tuesday (before visiting me.) Mrs. R. told by A.T. Office this p.m. that Miss Bolton had been allowed leave of absence to type script. B.A., according to Mrs. R., in restless mood. Has borrowed car on two consecutive days and driven off alone, returning late. Left message for him to call me on his return this evening.

Since it was now Thursday evening, there was nothing to add. When he examined the structure upon which his hopes were based, the structure seemed very slight.

Henry Dickson had spoken of "the edge of a nervous breakdown"; of Brooke Alder's references to the "world feeling" inside his head.

Howard Rey had spoken of hallucinations.

Brooke Alder himself had contributed only three clues: the signs of strain; the watchful look; the (apparently) quick change from his behaviour in Howard Rey's presence. His refusal to divulge what he was writing could hardly be counted as a clue.

Yet Merritt Lodge was at peace with his conviction that something was going to happen and that he would be in the key-position when it did happen.

"One, two, three, four, five,
Once I caught a fish alive!"

(How *did* the rest of the verse go?)

VIII

WHEN Harriette Rey drove her car into the courtyard, she saw that neither Brooke nor Howard was home yet. The garage doors stood open and the garage was empty.

Harriette was in a placid mood. She was enjoying her sleuth-work for Dr. Lodge. She had won forty *mille* at chemin-de-fer. She crossed the courtyard, went quickly through to the terrace to count the first stars, then came in, to the warmth and firelight of the living-room. She was making herself a drink when Serge appeared.

"A message from Mr. Rey, Madam. Not to wait dinner for him. He has been delayed in Nice."

"Thank you, Serge." It came as a relief. For five days now, Howard's mood had baffled her; he was obviously worried, but he wouldn't talk. He took every opportunity to stay away from the house while Brooke Alder was out of it. "Mr. Alder not in yet?" she asked.

Serge said no. The secretary, Miss Bolton, had called a little while ago and left a package for him.

"Oh. You'd better leave that with me."

"Excuse me, Madam. She asked if I would hand it to Mr. Alder myself."

"Never mind, Serge; I'll see that he gets it."

He knew better than to argue with her, she thought, but his expression was doubtful. "It's all right," she said soothingly. "Miss Bolton didn't quite understand, I expect."

He returned, carrying the package.

Harriette waited a few minutes, finished her drink and

then, with the parcel under her arm, strolled down the hall to the river-room. She opened the door. For a moment she could not find the electric switch and the room that was her room after all, filled with her treasures, seemed not to belong to her.

The curtains at the tall windows were undrawn and the light from the courtyard shone down the long dark gallery; she saw the shadowy shapes of things that she loved, become mysteriously new. The river made mournful music; and it was cold here. Brooke had left the windows open; the noise like the beat of a bird's wing beside her shoulder was the tapestry blowing against the wall.

She found the light. Still the room was not the same as it had been. She glanced up towards the dais, half-expecting to see somebody stand there.

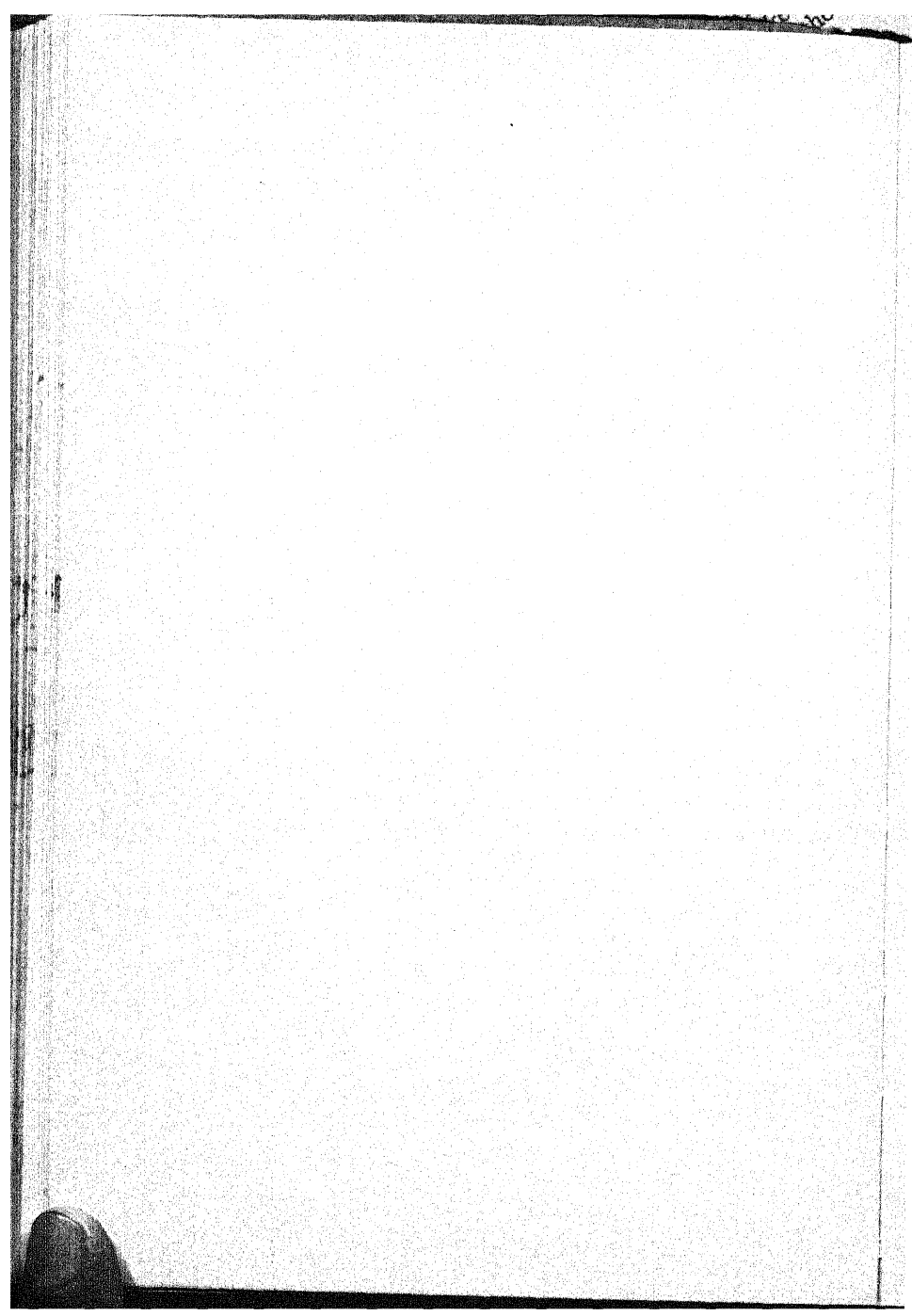
She heard her own footsteps on the parquet as she went to shut the windows and draw the curtains.

She would hear the car. If Brooke drove into the courtyard now, she would have to leave the parcel on his table and go. She listened. Bless Millie for not having sealed the ends; the string slipped off easily. She could still tie it up again if the noise of the car came now. It did not come.

Between two sheets of cardboard, there lay three copies of the typescript with the manuscript enclosed in a separate envelope.

Still no sound outside. She detached one carbon copy from the rest; tied up the parcel again. She stood listening. Still no sound. Absurd to feel that she was watched.

THE ISLAND II



NARRATIVE OF VALDES

I

THIS to you; as wife to husband, as woman to man; as sinner to the person against whom I have sinned; and—hardest of all to say—as island rebel to the Guardian of the Law. It won't be easy to tell the story, because the "I" who lived the story is not here any more. Her life is over. I am not yet well acquainted with her successor, with the person who has survived. There are times when she seems to me a mere diminished remnant; half a ghost, haunting Leron rather than living. There are times when she seems stronger than the other "I" used to be; I cannot be sure yet. I can only tell and wait. Benumbed as I am, I risk no further pain. It is you who will be hurt. I cannot now hurt me.

The beginning of all the things that have ended at this moment: I was alone in the house after you had sailed on the world voyage. The servants had gone up the hill to see the last of the ship. It was, as you'll remember, a morning of clear, cold sunshine. I stood at the windows of our room, looking down over the tops of the trees, on to the half-moon of blue water where your ship had been. I turned back into the room.

It didn't feel like our room; it never had. Always it felt like yours, the room with the high ceiling, with the panelled walls, with the treasures of the past hoarded there. Absurd, I thought, after all these years, to feel that the room is not mine, that it merely lodges me and tolerates me.

I had only one wish, the wish that is uppermost as soon as you have sailed, to be out of here; to go from these desolate splendours to the house that is really mine, the stone farmhouse on the border of the South. I should be

there by afternoon, but I couldn't quite believe it. When my servant came back from the hill, I hustled her to finish the packing quickly. Peter and the Council car were waiting below. They would take me by the highway to the Capital for the routine meeting of the Advisers. Una would go in another car, with the luggage, straight to the house.

"You look tired," she said, truculently and lovingly; the way that she always talks to me.

"I'll be more tired when the Advisers have finished with me."

"And as soon as you get to the house, you won't rest. Not for more than a day. You'll be digging new flower-beds and painting all the rooms different colours. I know you."

"That's what I like doing, Una; stop nagging, there's a good girl."

"If I were the Guardian, I'd take you with me."

"God forbid," I said; I was making up my face at the looking-glass; she was right; I looked exhausted, almost ugly, not the way that I must look to anybody's eyes except Una's. It is useless to try to hide anything from her. Long ago I gave up trying. To all others, the façade is credible. You believe it; Peter believes it; Una alone stares straight through it to the truth. And where once this made me uncomfortable, I now find it something of a relief. It is never mentioned between us; it never will be. I do not confide in her; I confide in nobody, but there is consolation in the thought that somebody besides God knows what I am thinking; even if the person is only Una, a peasant with no education and little vocabulary.

I could see her now, reflected over my shoulder in the glass; busy, bustling, usual, and I thought that I loved her very much. If I said this suddenly it would not, I imagined, surprise her; knowing me, she must know that. She doesn't, I thought, ask for love; she asks for nothing. By world standards, Una is a slave. She has inherited the

tradition of being a servant from her mother and from her grandmother, the family trade being handed down, as all the trades are. She doesn't see her work as slavery; she does it well, she likes it and she takes it for granted.

I have only one worry about Una; she has little use for her spare time. She has the devotion to work, which is right; and she is subject to disequilibrium when confronted by leisure, which is wrong.

Or perhaps, I thought, putting blue on my eyelids with my finger-tips, there are people to whom leisure is largely unnecessary, just as there are people who need little sleep. Why not? Mine is not the right to order Una to have fun of a sort that I recognise. "Temptations of authority," I said to myself. "Well, you ought to know those temptations by now. You do know them. You look at them, on occasion, as squarely as you look now at your own restored face in the glass. You have the habit of authority, Valdes. You have learned your own trade and if you cannot take it for granted, as Una takes hers, you do at least take pride in doing it well."

My thoughts stopped there because they had begun to travel towards you, the Guardian; and I didn't want them to measure you up in resentment now that you were gone. I rose from the dressing-table. Una looked at me and might as well have said, "That's better." Her eyes shouted it.

"I am going," I said. "What do I need?"

"The papers he gave you."

"I have them."

"I can't think of anything else."

"That means there's nothing else."

"Don't let them keep you there for ever."

"I won't. Goodbye, Una."

"Goodbye, my lady."

Peter was waiting in the hall. He had his Deputy-Guardian's face on already; for the first few days after you

go, he looks like this, top-heavy, precarious, as though he expected somebody to laugh at him or as though he himself might laugh and didn't want to.

As we drove down the road, I looked back at the house; at its white Palladian shape against the trees. From now until your return it would be lifeless; a shell of empty rooms. For a moment I felt genuinely fond of it, sincerely sorry to be leaving it. I was no longer bound to it, so I loved it. (The incorrigible weakness in me that makes me resent obligation and, as soon as the obligation is removed, makes love a fact.) Peter saw my look. He seemed embarrassed as though he had spied on me, turning his head away quickly. His profile, under the gilded peak of his cap, was carefully expressionless.

We took the familiar road; the highway which you have told me, with your meticulous knowledge of the world as it used to be, is like the old highways of the twentieth century; except that it has few signs and no speed-limit. Looking inland to my left, I could see the mountain range; first the wooded hills, then the bare rocks and the peak of White Wall; on the other side, the moors that stretched to the sea.

I was very much aware of the island today. I always am on the day that you sail. It's as though, when you are here, I use your eyes to see it and only recover the use of my own in your absence. Sharply, in renewed forgotten focus, I saw this Leron that you love. I saw its bones, the cleft golden rock of the canyon, the highway piercing through; now, as we came out of the canyon, the plateau of the Mine, with the five towers shining like metal trees in the sun. And after the Mine, the road dropping and the landscape opening out below us; the green landscape with the wide river looping the dazzle of white stone that is the Capital; the dome of the Senate crystalline upon Memorial Hill. The river cutting the city in two as it flows into Main Harbour. There was a sunny mist all over Main Harbour

today; it softened the outline of the wharves and the Customs-houses; beyond them there was a lit, ghostly frieze of masts and then no sea, no horizon; just the city poised on the edge of the bright air.

We came in by the North Gate and along the broad, tree-planted avenue that skirts the green glacis until it comes to Memorial Hill. Now at the crown of the hill there was the Senate in its gardens; and facing it, across the rampart, across the hill, across the centuries, the straight-walled stone palace that the first men built. Here, I said to myself, as I have said before, we come to the island's seat of reason. (There are those who would call it Leron's heart, but I dare not think that way, lest I become too much aware of it; the implacable heart on which I break my own.)

Through the Senate courtyard, past the sentries of the Legion; into the hall where the slashed banners hang downward from the ceiling, and the twin parchments, the Declaration and the Charter of Leron, lie side by side under glass. Along the echoing corridors that now felt, to my mind at least, deserted and abandoned by you. My sense of responsibility rose to meet this sense of loss. I looked at Peter and thought that the same emotions were his. When you are gone, we are in one meaning lost and in another meaning found. Perhaps, I thought, coming to old ground in my mind, we need the removal of your personality to feel the strength of your impulse.

We entered the Council room that looks out on the green gardens. All the Advisers were there and waiting for us. They had for me the newly-sharpened focus that the island had, and in this focus of my own vision the six faces reflected the change made by today, made by your going.

"It takes them different ways," I thought: "Dalzano's delicate ivory face is disdainful because he despises himself for feeling rudderless without you. Bernard, whose detachment is of a sunnier sort, grins at his own perplexity.

Pendean, the large simple brown animal, looks unashamedly bereft. Tribe has decided to pull down yet another vizzor upon the vizzor that was there already; I wouldn't have thought that his lack of expression could be doubled, because what is involved is surely subtraction, rather than addition, but there it is.

"Scansen is breathing urgency, and this accentuates everything about him, so that his hair seems redder and his bones bigger. Michaelis, the youngest, hasn't yet decided what he feels, and the result of the indecision upon that fair round face is comically like the look of a child eating an ice for the first time."

A large part of my training, I thought as I took my place, has been this immediate looking outward at the people who surround me on every public occasion; it is a deliberate work. It makes a vizzor as effective, in its way, as Tribe's blank look is effective. But it cannot be faked. I cannot look as though I am thinking about them unless I am. And at first, in my young self-consciousness, I found it hard to point my thoughts their way at once. The trick comes easily now.

I put your papers on the table in front of me and they began to discuss the routine summer-affairs; each of them speaking for his own charge; Scansen, wanting to know whether there was any modification of the rule against foreigners visiting the Mine and, as usual, seeming disappointed that there was not; Tribe reporting that Gerlach was approaching the last stages of an important experiment at Station X; Peter interrupting with his inevitable grumble at the scientists; Michaelis, with a stammer, putting before us the fact that some of the University students had revived the hoary menace of the New Guard. When you and I have discussed the New Guard, you have pointed out to me that its recurrence always coincides with a period of world prosperity. I reminded them of this now.

"When the world seems to be in a good way," I said,

"some devoted persons take fright and say 'This won't do. The Leron philosophy is safer when the world's in trouble. Now that it is not, we are threatened by the rival system. We must protect ourselves by isolation.' Then they set about to devise the most reactionary programme they can think of. It's the Leron form of Revolution."

Dalzano yawned, gracefully, like a cat: "Oh for the days when it was the Claimant who gave trouble, and not our loyal supporters."

"What exactly has been said or done, Michaelis?" Peter asked.

"All words so far, Deputy. Debates and speeches. Chief points being that we should restrict the foreign visitors still further; cut out some Tropic Side privileges. More pompously, they suggest that we increase our home production in order to reduce imports, and keep more Leronite on the island. And there's a virtuous little proposition for compulsory public service for all students in vacation-time."

"Oh God," said Dalzano, "why is youth such a bore?"

"Anyway," Peter said, "it's small stuff; students' stuff. It will come to its natural end with the vacation." And we left it there.

Pendean was fussing about the number of foreign ships that were trying to put in without clearance by Coast Patrol at Main Harbour. Dalzano said that this was seasonal. "They're either luxury yachts from the West or depressing cultural cruises from the East. I can't make an Embassy issue out of those."

"You can if they try to tie up anywhere but Tropic Side," Pendean said, "and they are trying. I've the Coastal Patrol report here."

"All right, give it to me," said Peter. "You and I'll go into this together, Dalzano. Bernard, what's on your mind?"

Bernard had a letter in his hands; his black eyebrows twitched: "I think you'll agree that this is the funniest

request that's come our way for some time. It was delivered to the Senate yesterday, and I wish I'd seen it before the Guardian left. It comes from Julian." He read it aloud. It was a formal request for Senate permission to allow the foreigners to gamble at Tropic Side.

"Tropic Side," it reminded us, "is only significant as a world playground. My policy is to give the foreign visitors what entertainment they wish. These entertainments, as the Council is aware, yield financial profits to the Companies in the West who operate them. My job is simply to stage them. With the rest of the people of Leron, I work because I like to work. I have never allowed the Western operators to dictate to me in any matter concerning Tropic Side, and I never shall.

"It is not a result of outside pressure, therefore, but on my own impulse, and after considerable thought, that I am putting forward this request to the Senate. It seems to me that for the foreign visitors to gamble at Tropic Side in Western currency would not fundamentally infringe the law; any more than their present system of paying in their own country for the amusements that I give them here infringes the law. The difference is only one of geography."

"Well," said Bernard. "How do we like being asked formally to bless the use of money on Leron?"

I looked around the table. All except Tribe were grinning broadly. Peter said, "It's prettily put. Who wrote it for him, do you suppose?"

Dalzano said, "I call it both winsome and touching. Dear Julian."

"I call it damned impertinence," said Michaelis. Tribe coughed, the small sharp cough that is always an irritation to me. "I imagine," he said, "that it's merely a matter for formal refusal."

"Well, of course," said Peter. "But it's funny, all the same."

I made my voice light and lazy when I said, "He has a good

case there." I had felt my temper rising; not because I cared about the issue one way or another, but because I could see the point of Julian's argument, and for the Advisers not to see it demonstrated to me once again the threat of hypocrisy among us. Peter looked at me with a comical grimace. Bernard said, "Valdes, you're not suggesting that we take this seriously?"

"Oh, no, I'm only suggesting that his argument does hold water. The Law says 'No money on Leron', but we don't carry the Law to the length of demanding that every foreigner should empty his pockets of cash before he's allowed to come ashore at Tropic Side."

"Well, no, naturally not," said Peter, sounding a little uneasy; "because he can't use it here. If we let him gamble, he could."

"He wouldn't be using it as a means of exchange with Leron. It would be an exchange of Western currency among the visitors. That breaks the letter of the Law, already broken. Physically, there is money on Leron, every night."

"The actual wording of the Law forbids the use of money on Leron," said Peter.

"Meaning the use of money for Leron, by Leron. Julian's right," I said, "when he calls it a difference of geography."

"I think," said Dalzano, "that when we draft the reply, we might include a few words of congratulations upon the phrasing."

I was now aware of the thing that you have called the shadow upon me. You have asked me more than once what it is that drops the shadow, and I have not told you because I have ceased to want to tell you. It comes out of a sudden, desolate sense of detachment from all that happens here. Any small absurdity, such as this that was happening around the Council table, can invite it, can set me apart and make me realise that I am not wholly made for Leron.

When I was younger, it frightened me. But when you

have lived for a long time with a lie, you learn to endure; to be strong with your own weakness, as though it were a bodily handicap that you conquer cleverly; you learn, as it were, to walk crippled and to make others believe that you are walking straight. It could be called, I suppose, a process of steadily, unconsciously chipping away at your own integrity. Rarely now I admitted that it was this for me.

II

I STOOD on the terrace of the house. It was good to be here and I no longer felt exhausted. My vitality, as Peter once remarked, begins south of the Capital. This was home-coming, to the scene and the air that I love. I leaned on the low wall, looking across the valley; to pine and rock and cypress, to the pinkish hill-town that makes a coronet on its own peak. And I saw a hawk hover and I smelled the pines and I heard the river falling behind the house.

The light here is different, I said to myself, from the light in the North. However pure and cold that light may be, it has never the brimming, innocent clarity of this; and the return of this light, these colours, these scents and sounds makes a moment of peace that never seems like an end but always like a beginning; a peace that must be the prelude to adventure.

That is an echo from childhood; like the scent of the one flower that grows on Tropic Side. And the thought of adventure is juvenile, I said to myself; adventure is not an adult need. But because I am childless (and this is a thought that I have not shared with you) I am subject to a feeling of unfinished destiny. And a part of my mind, which you have called adult, is still immature. Perhaps the fact that I recognise it is a promise of eventual maturity; or perhaps nobody is wholly grown-up inside. Perhaps those who look

mature from the outside, still nourish the small, deplorable prisoner within.

The sunsets in the South, I thought, are a cliché, but I still lingered to watch the cliché write itself in fire. The noise that the river makes is suddenly louder at this moment; you hear the leaves of the plane trees rustle; looking back towards the house, you see it in more solid shape, with the yellow tinge of the stone walls deepening, and the violet shadows. It is still very much a farmhouse, solitary, self-sufficient; with its trees, its river, its hollow of garden below the terrace wall. You remember how it looked on the day that I first saw it and wanted it.

I went in because Una would be sad if I didn't eat my dinner promptly. I can feel the little tug of the time-table even here, I thought; and it irks me and yet I could not live to no time-table at all. Not wishing to waste any more thought on me, I went to the bookcase and chose a volume of poetry to read over dinner.

It was Merlin's last volume. "Merlin," I said to myself again, "writes true poetry. We know it and the world knows it. Merlin, though he has never left the island, is a world hero." I had the precarious feeling that I always have when I think of the artists: that one day the unpredictable sources of genius will dry up and there'll be no more artists on Leron. A more serious thing, in my view, than the failure of the Lake. It doesn't happen, of course, but the idea sometimes comes to me, along with the accustomed mystery; the mystery of the treasures that went when the first world foundered.

It is a question that we have asked ourselves again and again. And asking it, I find that I can be angry with the first men. Why did they save this and lose this? We assume that they saved what was left, but we do not know. How much of music is lost for ever? How much of literature? What painting, what sculpture might we have seen, that we shall never see? There are the words; the missing epics

of Homer, the missing Sonnets of Shakespeare. With those immortal absentees, there went the lost Symphonies of Beethoven and Chopin's lost Studies.

Of these and many more we know; there must be a great deal of which we know nothing. We have clues: numbers in catalogues, torn pages from old albums, a few wax records preserved in their frailty. And in the libraries and museums, I said to myself, there are men working still to recover the buried gold of the past. But they will never find it all.

When I have discussed this with you, you have said that perhaps it was for the new men, the makers who come afterwards, to find. Because, you think, the phrases in music, like the lines of poetry, like the shapes in stone, once thought of, must still be there, within the range of human concept and human discovery. Rydal in his studio at Ste Croix could—according to your philosophy—have painted a portrait that was Rembrandt's. Merlin, according to you, may have written lines identical with Shakespeare's. Nobody but God, you say, will ever know what is lost and what is restored. I wish that I could feel thus comforted, that I could have your gigantic assurance, your faith.

Since I cannot have it, I brooded over my dinner in the candlelight and felt cheated, because the older world failed (by what looks to us like deliberate suicide) to pass on the full heritage.

But melancholy palls on me soon enough; and by the time that Una brought my coffee I had a wish for frivolous things.

"What I should like to do," I thought, "would be to go to Tropic Side." No reason why I should not; except that it would be impossibly undignified to do it alone and on the day of your departure. Still, I played with the idea; imagining the look on Julian's face as he led me to the table among the flowers; trying to preserve his polished restaurateur's manner while he speculated on the reasons for my break

with tradition. Probably, I said to myself, he would think that I had come to give him a rap over the knuckles for his request to the Senate.

I thought about that. With Peter, I should have to approve the final draft of the Senate reply. And I should assent to the Council decision; and I should still see the flaw in our argument, the reason in Julian's.

III

It was a week before I went to Tropic Side; a week of amiable solitude; gardening, reading and painting, climbing to Nôtre Dame des Rochers to hear the dawn Mass; plaguing Una with my erratic time-table and my restlessness. I had your first cables; at midday the Council courier came down to the house with the scarlet dispatch-boxes. The island affairs seemed, as ever here, to intrude oddly upon my sanctuary. I spent one evening at Ste Croix, gossiping with Merlin, Rydal and the rest round a café-table. I saw little of Peter because the Legion manœuvres had begun.

Dalzano was giving a dinner-party at Tropic Side. He had invited me and I had said that I would prefer to join the party later. The habit of solitude grows on me so quickly in this place that any set piece of entertainment, involving six people of whom I must be one, is to be avoided. I dined at home and ordered my car and my driver to be here at half-past nine. Una disapproved.

"You won't be back till all hours."

"Probably not. What an inaccurate expression 'all hours' is," I said. "I wonder how it originated."

She continued disapproving. "Don't know what you see in that rackety place; I really don't."

"You weren't born in the South, Una. Only Southerners can appreciate Tropic Side."

She sniffed. I was wearing the dress that she thinks unbecoming to me: the dress copied from the designs fashionable in France's Second Empire. She looked me up and down as I rose. "It's not right for you to go there without an escort. If the Duke had proper manners, he'd have come to fetch you."

"I particularly asked that nobody should. Dalzano has proper manners and he did offer."

She sniffed again. "Well, you owe it to your own self-respect, to your position, I'd have thought."

"If my self-respect and the dignity of my position depend on a male escort from here to Tropic Side, it's a sad pity."

She said in one of her sudden moods of capitulation, "Well, so long as you enjoy yourself, that's all that matters. Only don't get too tired."

"I won't. Good night, dear Una."

It is lonely for her here, I thought; with only old Jacques the gardener and his wife for company. Yet she protests that she likes it and wants nobody else.

We drove down towards the sea, towards the lights on the water and the circling lights of the town. When we came to the middle of the town, we had to drive slowly. Already the strollers were all over the road, drawn by the pretty things in the lit windows, diverted by a café where a violin played, or by the thin piping of the wooden flutes, the oldest music on Leron. It was like driving through stage scenery.

The square was dramatic, as always; floodlit for the summer season; overhead there were the black, pointed palm-leaves and the arching multiplex of stars. I saw that Julian had floodlit the palace differently this season. Where before, the whole terraced rock on which it stood had been illuminated, this now was left in darkness, so that the palace looked as though it were a ship of glass beached on the little dark cliff above the harbour; the harbour itself was

ablaze with the shore-lights and the lights of the foreign yachts. I could see the Leronese canoes shooting across the coloured water.

I told my driver to stop the car on the waterfront. I wanted to stand there for a moment and sniff the scent of the one flower. It is as haunting to me as the thin note of the wooden flutes. Just for a moment, it brings back the thoughts that belong to my youth—to the lightly valued freedom, to the beginning of all, with the magic that whisks around the corner of the mind and is gone.

Julian was on the steps to meet me. To-night, because of his unorthodox request to the Council, I found myself staring at him more thoroughly than usual. There is a resemblance to the earlier Claimants; we have remarked upon it; it is a coincidence; it means nothing. I noted it again, in the dark, merry eyes and the strong jaw. The dilution of native blood, I thought, is only discernible in his movements; the Leronese natives have the complete co-ordination of snakes, and Julian has it.

He was dressed as usual, to the world fashion, in a white jacket and trousers. He contrives, I thought, to be tough and elegant at the same time; is that a reflection of his true personality or is it a façade? I could see our two façades meeting. Mine was made of kindly patronage. An unexpected memory from childhood obtruded against it: one small dark scapegrace thumbing his nose at another small dark scapegrace; the time when he threw wet sand at me on South-West Beach and I held him down and pummelled him until he cried. I hadn't thought of it in years and I wondered if he remembered.

He told me that I was in time to see the flying men, a feature of his usual freakish cabaret. I forgot him for a while, sitting at Dalzano's table beside the window in the rainbow-coloured room, at a distance from the foreign crowd. The glass roof divided and stood open to the stars. The flying men darted upward, with a batlike flicker of

their false wings; the spotlights followed them, a pursuit of coloured lances, hunting high.

"Fun," I said to Dalzano, "rather beautiful and rather horrible."

(It was, now that I come to think of it, a frivolous prophecy of what happened with Gerlach at Station X.)

We strolled out afterwards to watch the other sort of flying men, the divers at the pool. Their luminously painted bodies came down from the high boards like falling comets and flashed through the water like phosphorescent fish.

I could hear the note of the wooden flute while I watched them; but I didn't see the player until Dalzano and I walked away. He was a native boy sitting by one of the smaller pools; stripped and shining, with his feet in the water. He had drawn an audience; they stood on the terrace above him, looking down and applauding; he would smile at them and wave his hand before he began to play another of the island tunes. We are accustomed to see the natives pose for the foreign visitors, but it seemed to me now that there was none of their naïveté in this boy's pose; there was an assurance not altogether attractive. I remarked upon it to Dalzano.

"There's some white blood there," Dalzano said.

It was then that I saw Julian; he had come out on to the terrace and he stood alone, a little apart from us, looking down at the boy. The tune ended; the boy smiled up to us again and waved his hand; there was the same little clatter of applause; he put the flute to his lips.

I had not noticed the flight of steps cut from here to the pool, and when Julian ran down the steps he gave me the illusion of gliding down a straight wall of rock, in one movement, to stand before the boy.

The boy rose, with something of the same grace; then, under the light, I saw the two attitudes, the two profiles; they were unmistakably matched.

I could not hear what Julian said to him. By their

pantomime, it was an order to go and the boy refused it, standing defiantly. Julian took him by the arm. The boy struck at him and I was astonished by the swift brutality with which Julian hit back; the blow was straight, instant and savage, as though all his anger were in his hand.

The boy staggered and hid his face, then he ran, by the pathway that circles the pool; he vanished in the dark. Julian stood, looking after him; he put his right hand into his pocket and turned slowly towards the steps. It was that last gesture that interested me the most, as if he needed to hide the hand that had struck the blow. I knew now certainly that the boy was his son.

"No, I won't go in yet," I said to Dalzano, "I'll have to speak to Julian."

"Dearest Valdes, he could not have known that you were here."

He thought that my dignity was offended. He added, "One must never be surprised at anything that happens in this place." Apparently he had not seen the thing that I saw.

"Go," I said, "I'll follow."

"I will wait for you."

"Please don't. I want to talk to him alone."

Dalzano fingered the lace at his throat; then said coldly, "As you wish, of course."

The boy's audience, having watched the scene and having nothing more to watch, drifted away. I passed through them and met Julian at the head of the steps. It was the first time that I ever saw him ill-at-ease.

"What was the reason for that?" I asked him, pointing down towards the pool.

His face hardened. He said, "I'm sorry you saw it, my lady."

"Why shouldn't he play the pipe there? He plays well. We were enjoying it."

"I'm sorry, my lady."

"He was doing no harm."

"I don't allow anybody to give side-shows here without my permission."

"Oh? Is it a good enough reason for hitting a boy of that age in the face? You must have hurt him badly."

"For that," he said in a more natural voice, "I am very sorry."

"I'm still waiting for an explanation, Julian."

"Am I bound to give one?" he asked quietly, as though he were talking to himself.

"I think you are."

"The boy," he said, looking at me steadily, "is a bad boy. He leads a gang of young idiots whose fun is to carry knives and make trouble. I've forbidden them to come here. He's had his warning often enough."

("And yet," I thought, "you are fond of him. This tortures you.")

I wanted to say, "Has he no parents to keep him in order?" but I found that I couldn't bring myself to say it. We stood looking at each other and I believed that, behind his eyes, he was thinking, "I could tell you, if you were not who you are." It was very strange to see Julian like this. I found myself wondering who were his friends, who knew his secrets. He had acquired in five minutes another dimension, a depth; after all these years of seeing the façade and only the façade.

I was aware that we had stood silent for many seconds. Now we appeared to switch off the current of sympathy together. He said again, "I am very sorry, my lady," and I said, "I accept the explanation and the apology. I don't accept the behaviour, but then I don't think that you yourself accept it."

He gave me a stiff, polite bow. He asked if he might escort me back to Dalzano's table.

Now the little words: "Your foreign clientèle seems to have doubled itself this year."

"Yes," he said. "One result of world prosperity."

"How few islanders come here, still."

He looked at me as we walked: "Very few, my lady. That's as it should be."

"Why?"

"I don't cater for Leron. I cater for the world."

"Yes," I said, "Tropic Side is on the island—and off it."

"I don't like to think that, but I suppose it's true. When an islander begins to come here regularly, he worries me. There's one now." He glanced in through the lit windows. "No; he was here earlier. It's time for him to be on the tower, of course. Orrey," he said, "Orrey from the Mine."

I was surprised. It seemed an unlikely context for him. Orrey has always reminded me a little of you; not only because of his size and strength and thoughtful forehead, but because he gives the effect of dedication.

"Does Orrey come here so often?"

"Lately he has, yes."

"You say that worries you."

"Yes, it does."

"Why does it?"

Julian narrowed his eyes. "Difficult to put into words. I'm not too good at words, anyway. But I'd say the islander who takes to Tropic Side is losing his balance."

I could not imagine Orrey's losing his balance. I said, "On what theory?"

"Theory of time-killing," said Julian, "that's all anybody can do here. Pleasantly enough; but on Leron you don't find many people wanting to kill time."

"No, true."

"If I were Scansen," he said, "I'd keep an eye on Orrey. Excuse me, my lady; I know it's none of my business, but now and again I see things that the Advisers don't get a chance to see." We went into the rainbow-coloured room and he left me at Dalzano's table.

The last that I saw of him that night was when we were

leaving. He came out on to the steps. As we drove away, I glanced back over my shoulder. He was still standing there; he looked lonely and dominant, as I have seen you look when you rise to address the Senate.

IV

LOOKING back, it seems to have happened so quickly. There was that night of new acquaintance with him and then I do not remember the two intervening days. I remember next the moment of morning when I was walking in the garden, dressed in men's clothes, with my sleeves rolled up and a pair of shears in my hand. I had heard an unusual noise upon the road above and only half-marked it in my mind. I hadn't begun to wonder whose car it was, as well I might, the Council cars being silent. Una came out to find me, looking ruffled.

"I don't think you'll want to see him," she said as preliminary.

"Who?"

"Julian from Tropic Side. I told him you didn't like receiving unexpected visitors."

"What does he want?"

"He says it is serious."

"All right," I said. "Send him here."

She looked at me all over from the crown of my head to my bare feet in sandals. "You'll receive him like that?"

"Certainly."

She clicked her tongue in disapproval, with the noise that servants and nurses have been able to make since I can remember, though I have never mastered it. I waited for him. In a moment he came hurrying down under the trees. He was different. He had no restaurateur's manner to-day; he looked dark and powerful and a little dangerous. He

did not smile at all. (The face, I thought, is heavier and less handsome when the light goes from it. But he is more real than he was.)

"I've no excuse for coming to you," he said. "But after what happened the other night, I thought you'd understand."

"Understand what, Julian?"

"It is about the boy."

I waited.

"His name is Teruel. He is my boy; I'm his father," he said, looking me in the eyes. "Somehow I thought you guessed that; I don't know why."

"You were right; I did guess."

He nodded. "Hard to make you believe I'm fond of him."

"No," I said, "I saw that too."

"How could you see?"

"When you put your hand in your pocket; after you hit him."

He gave a twisted smile: "Did I? I don't remember."

"What can I do for you—or for him?"

"He's in a new kind of mischief," said Julian—"over at Station X."

"What sort of mischief can he do there?"

"From your point of view—nothing serious," he said bitterly.

"And from yours?"

"The note he sent me said that he might be dead by the time I got it."

"They don't kill people at Station X," I told him, feeling as though I spoke to a child. "The only way that he could get into danger there would be to try to pass the sentries."

"It isn't anything like that, my lady. He's offered himself to Gerlach for an experiment."

This sounded highly improbable. "How would he know Gerlach at all?" I asked.

"He'd pick up with anybody who flattered him."

"And why should Gerlach flatter him?"

Julian hesitated. Then he said, "I'm not quite sure yet," and I thought that he was sure, but that he wasn't going to tell me. After his rush of confidence, I did not like this obvious covering-up. So I refused his request, though I could have done as he asked and instructed Tribe to issue him with a pass for Station X. Instead I left him on the terrace and went in to telephone.

Tribe's report was reassuring. I came back to Julian. He was leaning on the low wall, staring across the valley.

"I've talked to the Adviser; nothing has happened. Teruel is simply sitting in Block Four—that's Gerlach's laboratory—waiting for Gerlach's instructions. The Adviser doesn't know exactly why Gerlach wants him there, but he guarantees that the boy is safe."

Julian looked at me doubtfully. "How can he guarantee that?"

"The scientists are responsible to the Adviser for all that they do. They are obliged to submit an interim report at every stage of research. Tribe would never countenance an experiment that endangered human life."

"You're sure of that?"

"Quite sure. My guess would be that Teruel is trying to dramatise himself to you."

He looked as though he wanted to tell me all of it and I was tempted to invite him to talk; but I didn't yield to the temptation. There was, in his physical presence today, something that made me uneasy. He thanked me and went. The car, Una said, was obviously a foreign car, painted a bright ugly yellow; and it had what looked like a tail-fin at the back. "And what a horrible noise it makes," she said; "but he's very handsome, isn't he? And did you notice the dog?"

She meant your brindled wolf-dog who loves nobody but you, who grudgingly accepts me and bites all strangers.

"What about the dog?"

"He was friendly to Julian. Wagged his tail."

"I didn't notice."

She asked, "Is it true that some of them down there still call Julian the Claimant?"

V

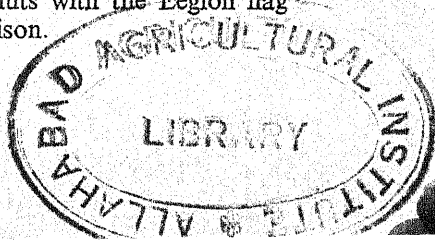
As you know, I have no interest in the affairs at Station X. But the connection between Gerlach and Julian's illegitimate son had aroused my curiosity. I drove that afternoon by the highway to the New Lands.

Why do we still call them the New Lands? "At the beginning," the record says, "they were unreclaimed marshes; miles of wet flats along the east coast, separated by the river from the last of the Southern territory."

Somehow they still seem as though they do not belong to us, nor to anybody; the flats lying always under a dazzle of mist, looking like a ghost of the old waters that once covered them. Here the sky hangs low. The only living things that appear to have a right to the landscape are the sheep that graze and the wild duck flying.

The Council car took me swiftly. We came through the University town, neat as the model that the architect made for it. I do not know how he, that man with a passion for the simplest line, achieved so dead a unity. It astonishes me, every time I come here; the College buildings pointing up like a cathedral at the centre of a star of streets where all the houses conform to the pure and rigid pattern. It is not, as you know, a place that I could love, though it is loved.

We were out of it; the road bent towards the coast and I could see the stranded fortress of Station X; outside the walls, the scatter of long, low huts with the Legion flag flying; the camp of the East garrison.



I had never visited Block Four, the wing extending from the back of the fortress. Tribe escorted me; we went down a corridor that ran the length of it, up a short flight of steps. Gerlach's laboratory, I thought, perched like a conning-tower.

The heavy door swung open. The first person that I saw was the boy Teruel, shut away from me behind a complication of machinery. He looked sulky and vivid; he wore the flowered shirt and narrow trousers that the native boys like to wear. Gerlach advanced to meet me. He is old, I thought, but he wears a mask of false youth; it is an impressive head, set on too small a body. His manner was facetious and elaborate; he giggled, he scraped, and still I could see that he was not pleased.

"So good of you to come. I am flattered that my little demonstration—you know nothing of it?"

"Nothing at all."

"So?" Gerlach looked over his shoulder. "This brave young man, he knows nothing either. Take him down," he said to one of his assistants. "We are nearly ready."

Most of the floor-space was occupied by a heavy steel cylinder, a sort of slanted cannon with a solid base clamped to the ground. The mouth of the cannon pressed against one wall. At Gerlach's invitation, I leaned on the window-sill beside it. Looking down, I saw what appeared to be the end of the cannon: a great glass bulge in the outer wall, like the eye of an enormous electric torch.

"It comes from there," Gerlach said. "And now, if you look, you will see the brave young man."

There was a concrete ramp built below, and a raised platform at the top of the ramp. I saw Teruel walk up to the platform. He had harness on his shoulders now; a parachute, I thought, strapped to his back. He took his place, standing very still with his arms at his sides; the wind blew in his hair. The assistant who had conducted him was idling at the foot of the ramp, smoking, looking up now

and again towards the window. Behind the two figures there was only the flat green land running away towards the sea.

I could hear Gerlach muttering instructions, snapping switches. When I turned, he smiled at me: "There is nothing to watch here, my lady. If you please, keep looking at the platform."

I looked. Nothing happened except that the assistant threw away his cigarette. Teruel's hair went on flapping. Behind me now I heard Gerlach's short, panting breath; the breath of a man with a faulty heart.

"So—you see the hawk?" said Gerlach suddenly; he giggled again. "That hawk flies high; I am sending a diver up for him."

I heard the click of a switch pressed down; a double click; on; off. The light on the platform and on Teruel's taut figure changed for a second; this was all that I saw, a wink of new light and then the boy rising into the air. He did go up like a diver. It was too odd to be alarming. Gerlach had left the cylinder. He came to stand between Tribe and myself, watching the figure grow smaller against the sky.

"If it were not all right," he said, "he would continue to rise. But in that case, of course, we might be rising too."

The little black figure spun and hovered. The parachute opened, drifted down, a white puff-ball, over the marsh.

"That is all, my lady," Gerlach said. "Something to tell his grandchildren."

Tribe wore his habitual vizor. He left it to me to ask, "What did you do to him?"

"Nothing. And that is the truth. I did nothing to the young man. It was to the three square feet of steel on which he stood that I did something."

"What?"

He hesitated. He was like Julian saying "I am not sure yet." He was sure. "This is the first experiment that I have

made with a human body. I only made it when I was certain that the ray could be controlled to a fraction of a second. I did not want to push him all the way up into the stratosphere."

"But what is it, Gerlach?"

"It is beginning to look," he said, "as though we could turn off the law of gravity."

My instant reaction was, "And what good would that do to us—or to anybody?" Then I found it comical that all these months of Gerlach's work should end in something so improbable and so pointless. I cannot now think how I could have been blind to the implications. I suppose that, because I had come here to find out about Teruel, I still had Teruel in mind rather than the thing that I had seen happen to him.

I asked, "Why did you pick that boy? Where did you find him?"

By Gerlach's expression, I might have blasphemed. I saw him control himself before he answered, "He was brought to me by Amyas, the lawyer. Amyas is interested in him. Apparently he has unusual intelligence. He is only half-native, as you may have seen." All the time that he was speaking, his cold blue eyes looked at me with a gleam; a gleam reflecting hostility and pity. "My dear lady," the eyes said, "are you really so foolish as to talk of the boy and ignore the experiment?"

But my thoughts had leapt towards Amyas and his small clique; those who keep the Claimant's case alive, those of whom Julian complained to you and to me last year. What interest had Amyas in Julian's bastard son? I said goodbye to Gerlach without asking any of the questions that he must have expected. As we went from Block Four to the gate, Tribe said, "He is working with Leronite, you know," and even then I didn't see.

It was good to be outside the walls. The gloom of the scientific fortress stops short here, I thought; and I told

my driver to wait while I strolled towards the sea. Two soldiers of the Legion passed me, arguing heatedly.

"I tell you it was a man."

"Go on. Must have been a rock. They've got some sort of gun that shoots rocks. Nobby saw one go up last week."

"It was a man."

"Go on."

I came to a low bridge. At the sound of my step, wild duck clattered up from the reeds and strung out towards the sea. Ahead of me on the marsh, the parachute came down in its last dance; it fluttered and folded. I waited on the bridge until Teruel came, dragging the parachute. He held a blood-stained handkerchief to his face.

"Are you hurt?" I asked him.

"No, thank you, my lady." He smiled at me; Julian's smile. His voice had not the metallic quality of the native voice; it was educated, hushed, surprising. "It just made my nose bleed," he said. "You were watching, weren't you?"

"Yes. Where are you going now?"

"Back to Station X," he said, watching me warily.

"Not to Tropic Side?"

"Not yet, no, my lady."

"I am going there. Have you any message that you'd like to send?"

He flushed, he mumbled, "No, I don't think so," and looked away. I contented myself with saying, "There is nothing clever about causing people anxiety, you know," as I turned and left him.

It was, of course, a quicker way home by Tropic Side. And I saw no reason why I should not pass by Julian's house; ostensibly to give him the news that the boy was safe; in fact to see if he knew of Teruel's connection with Amyas. I could only think that this was what he tried to conceal from me.

"We pay little attention to Amyas and his friends," I said to myself, talking to you in my mind, "Peter calls him a

senile fanatic and you yawn at his name. We treat those who make the Claimant's case their hobby as harmless eccentrics. Are we wise?"

VI

We left the flat marshes behind us; we came to the beginning of the orange-groves, the beginning of the South. Julian's house on the eastern point suited its setting, I thought; the white villa whose lines were like the lines of a ship.

The interior's luxury was elaborate. I was escorted by two native servants through a chain of rooms separated by doors that slid into the wall; I saw that these rooms were equipped with every device made possible by the Western hemisphere's peak of prosperity. It was not like any other house on the island.

The last door slid back and Julian, who had been writing at a desk, scrambled out of his chair.

"All right," I said to his polite discomfiture; "this is an informal visit. And I didn't give the servants my name."

"They should have recognised you."

"I don't know why they should."

He said boldly, "You are the last person I ever expected to receive under my roof."

"It's an impressive house, Julian."

"I had it all re-decorated this year. Do you like it?"

"I'm no judge of world designs."

"That means you don't like it."

"No. It means that I haven't had the chance to feel it yet." I sat down in the arm-chair beside his desk; I motioned him to sit. "I came to tell you that I have been to Station X. And I saw what happened to Teruel. He's safe. The experiment's over."

His look of relief touched me. He gave me one dazed smile and then came to kiss my hand.

He said, "I can't thank you enough. And I can't imagine what I've done to deserve this."

"Oh, no. I was interested."

"But I'm grateful for that too."

"You need not be."

He remained standing, looking down at me. I waited for him to speak.

"The boy . . ." he said and stopped. "Well, I think after this that you should know I've done my best to take care of him, since his mother died; that's four years ago. He hates and resents me—natural, I suppose."

"Not necessarily."

"I've often thought that he'd be happier off the island. Some of my Western friends, the men I work for, could give him a home and a job. He's agreed to go, more than once. Then when the time comes to sail, he runs away. Or that's how it used to be. But for months now he's declared war on me. Teruel's the only person who can make me lose my temper," he said, pacing the floor. "It's a bad temper but I've learned to control it. Except with him."

"How old is he?"

"Eighteen." He paused. "I can say this to you," he said, sounding surprised that he could: "The thing I dread most is that one day he'll kill and be convicted and live for ever. That's why I wanted him to go into the world. At least, there, they sentence them to death. It would be over. I don't believe," he said, "in any life after death. Does that shock you?"

I was noticing, frivolously as is sometimes my habit at serious moments of conversation, that his ears were neat, almost pointed, and that his nostrils curled; thinking that I should find it amusing to try to paint his portrait.

I said, "I think you are wrong, but it doesn't shock me. Is it for Teruel himself that you dread that punishment—or for you?"

He dodged the question. He said, "What do you believe?"

I don't understand religion; active religion, I've none."

"You mean that you don't use the faculty. To say 'I've no religion' is as untrue as to say 'I've no head' or 'no arms'. Everybody has that thing in him. Of course if it is not fed and nourished, it atrophies like an unused muscle."

He looked bewildered: "Well, what is it?"

"The supernatural part of you as opposed to the natural."

"And you think everybody has it?"

"I don't think. I know."

"How do you know?"

"Everybody has an instinct towards the supernatural, because everybody has a soul. Superstition is only belief in God that's taken a wrong turning."

He frowned. "Well, I know a lot of religious people who do bad things. How d'you explain that?"

"By the existence of good and evil."

Soon I found that his questions began to tire me with their simplicity; yet there was an absorption in this talk that made me forget why I had come here. I kept looking into his dark, puzzled eyes and seeing God's purpose in the pagan; who reminds us that we cannot take God for granted. (These are weaknesses of mine that you know: to be a good defender of the faith when the faith is questioned or attacked; and to experience liveliness of soul most often alone; to be at my lowest spiritual level in the presence of the explicit enthusiasts.) Julian was good for me today. And after I had left him, that talk seemed to be the whole point of our meeting.

I had the feeling of hypnosis that comes from talking long and deeply with a person of physical magnetism. My head ached all the evening. I went to bed early, but I did not sleep well. His face, his voice and the words that we had spoken stayed with me.

I could hear the sound of the river through my dreams, and our voices were in the river. (My voice: "I believe in

the abiding consequences of sin." His voice: "I suppose that is how I feel when I think about Teruel.") Words that were a scale of opposed values; I saw the scale; the word "God" lay in one balance and the word "Why" in the other. Then it became a telescope. I looked through one lens and saw the First Cause who made man as he is. Julian looked through the other lens and saw man making God in his own image, or deciding not to make him at all. In the dream, we kept exchanging the telescope, and though each tried to hold it straight, each turned it, so that the other had always the same view.

Then the voices in the river again. His voice: "From God to Leron." (But he never said that; I thought it.) "Amyas and his little warped friends. Yes, they've taken up the boy. Grooming him for Claimant. I'll pack him off the island. It's all nonsense but it's dangerous nonsense." My voice: "How serious are they?" His voice: "You know nothing of them. I see more than the Council sees." (But he did not say that either; it was I who thought it; thought that I could use Julian's eyes for a time and that this would be an instructive view of Leron. So one fools oneself.)

It seemed to me, when I was half-awake at dawn, that we had talked of everything; that he had a remarkable freshness of mind. The uneducated vision, I said to myself; he watches Orrey on the tower; he watches it all. We talked of the New Guard and he pointed out to me that this element of extreme reaction is always a young element; that it may be compared with the lawless extreme, with Teruel's waterfront gang who carry knives. And when these two explosive forces meet there will be fighting.

We talked of you and he said that the island always felt differently to him after you had sailed, that he could know without being told when you were gone.

And we talked of the request that he had made to the Council; and he said of gambling that it was a natural human instinct in the world where money was used; and we

agreed that it was childish and I did not think that he cared about our refusal of the request.

But I know that in this half-dream I made him say many wise things that he did not say; that I put into his mouth some words that were yours and some words that were mine.

At no time of the night, whether waking or dreaming or on the border in between, was I troubled by memories of what had happened at Station X. My fever contented itself with Julian.

VII

BECAUSE of all the stories that are being told about me now, because of the near-truths and the rumours, each of which has my name in the middle of it like the kernel of a nut, I want to tell the small events carefully. Not that I am seriously afraid of your believing the exaggerations; least of all, the malicious statements of those who make deliberate mischief.

They are a minority. The island, even at this troubled moment, still keeps the tradition of minding its own business and telling the truth. But we have here a few who manufacture slanders; you know their names. I have heard them called dangerous; yet, even in guilt, I fear them not at all. I have become the property of circumstance, but I do not feel that I have become these people's property. They would have used me in any case, if it had suited their mood. It is not the mischief-maker who endangers me here; it is not the mischief-maker who judges me. He is simply pursuing his normal recreation. The true assessor, the judge who has withdrawn his mercy and left me the poorer without it, is the honest man.

From the night of half-dream and voices in the river, the

night of obsession by Julian, I woke to find that I was running a temperature. This is, as you know, a thing that my body can do for no apparent reason; it happens in the morning and is over by afternoon.

I am not trying to make it an excuse for the letter that I wrote to Julian. I should have written to him in any case; but the hot feeling in my head gave the letter a needless urgency, set the whole business of it in untrue perspective. It seemed to me highly important (sitting in the shade on the terrace, trying to hide my illness from Una) that I should see Amyas and the others, "his little warped friends", for myself; see them and hear them talk; as soon as was possible.

That is why I commanded him to invite them to his house and to prepare for me to be there. This story has been told and re-told; you will hear it tomorrow, much exaggerated. It is said that I dined among them regularly, that I received them here; that I made friends with them behind the Council's back. None of those things happened. If Peter had not been away on the Legion manoeuvres, I should certainly have told him what I was going to do. I saw no need to give the Council warning of it, but you must remember that I told Peter as soon as it was done.

I was in Julian's house for less than an hour on that evening. It was one of the most farcical hours that I ever spent. He had not dared tell them whom they would meet and none of them, with the exception of Amyas, recovered equilibrium in my presence.

I can see them now; grouped at the end of the foreign-looking room; Julian leading me towards them, both of us shaken with laughter inside. (The deadly bond of laughter was forged between us that night.) There was the lawyer Amyas, in his white wig and black satins, with the face of an elderly vulture. There were Bren and his wife, the experts in economics. His round yellow face split in half when he smiled; he had the soaped Slav look, the high polish on skin and hair. She, with the black fringe across

her forehead, her black eyes, her serious, jutting chin, seemed for ever to strike an attitude of perspiring truculence. Two more partisans were Brocas, languidly epicene, the student of world history, and the little Countess. She was dark and rounded, yet prim; her boast, she told me, was that she could trace her pedigree back to the First Civilisation, and her hobby is this tracing of families to their origins; hence, of course, her preoccupation with the Claimant's case. The last was Moura, the big golden-looking woman with the ear-rings; her cause is Woman. She looks upon women as especially deserving and especially persecuted animals. She believes that women in the world today live freer than the women on Leron.

My effect on them was magical. They stiffened, they made positive, self-conscious shapes; they all talked loudly and strainedly; each as I spoke to him or to her was over-careful in the use of my title; each made small, punctual remarks that defined my rank and position. And they all went on doing this until I left; except Amyas, who surprised me in the last few minutes. I dared not catch Julian's eye too often.

(Of all the intimacies that I know, the meeting of the eyes in laughter is perhaps the most important. When your eyes and mine have met because we needed to laugh, I have felt closer to you than I have ever felt in your bed.)

I had listened to the Brens' exposition of the financial system; to Brocas lauding the progress of the Western hemisphere, which had, he said, "reached if not passed the twentieth-century level of culture and prosperity". I had let the Countess tell me how the first Dalzano had faked the quarterings of what was at best a five-hundred-year-old blazon. I had bided my time and kept my temper while Moura talked of a world run by women. And it came as a relief when old Amyas, turning his back to the rest, asked politely if he might know my reason for wanting their company.

"Why should it not be mere curiosity?" I asked him.

"That would be flattering," he said.

"Well, what do you think the reason is?"

He narrowed his eyes; if a vulture were in the habit of purring, I thought, I should expect him to purr.

"Perhaps it is the Council's intention to call us to order in future," he suggested.

"You would all like to be taken seriously?"

"My lady, for years we have been content to take ourselves seriously. And we are still content in that."

"I see you are," I said, glancing at Ludmilla Bren, who seemed to be posing for an action-photograph of a strenuous character.

"I wondered," said Amyas, taking snuff, "if this year's blue-print had come to the notice of the Advisers."

"This year's? Don't tell me that you bring it up to date, like a directory?"

"I congratulate you," he said, "on the impression that you give of neither knowing nor caring. You are a skilled diplomat."

For the first time that evening, I needed to be. I had no detailed knowledge of the blue-print; nor did I know that it was regularly revised; nor could I be certain that Amyas was speaking the truth when he said that it was. These people were not sane; they were not adult; they gave me the impression that I was shut up for a while with mad children. I remember thinking that I would ask Julian to acquire a copy of the blue-print for me; then saying to Amyas in a lightly grandiloquent manner, "If it were my hobby to collect reasons for putting an end to the Regime, I am sure that I should choose to live in the Capital rather than on Tropic Side. Surely here you are too far from the object of your studies."

"On the contrary, my lady; we are in an ideal position; half-way between the island and the world. Where could one get a more truly objective view?"

"In a balloon," I said and Julian was the only person who laughed. I left them and he took me to my car. "Thank you," I said, "it was highly educative."

He looked at me, still with the laughter in his eyes. "You're a wonderful person, aren't you? I've always known that; since I was six; since you rolled me in the sand on South-West Beach."

"You remember that?"

"Surely. Small boys don't forget being made to look silly."

"And the news of Teruel?" I thought to ask him, as I stepped into the car.

"He's gone off to climb White Wall; an unusually harmless occupation for him. In my belief," Julian said, with a movement of his head towards the house, "those creatures frightened him out of his wits."

"One minute. The blue-print that they talk of?"

He said that he would try to get it for me.

The next time that I saw him was two days later; he had called to tell me that though the blue-print was mysteriously untraceable, he had collected some details that I might find interesting. He asked if he should send them and I said No; bring them to the house. Peter was dining with me and I asked Julian to come at five.

I remember a fragment of conversation with Una before he came.

"Would you say that it was easier to see the island clearly from his side of the border?"

"Easier?"

"Easier than it is for us, I mean."

"It might be," Una said, "if you don't have responsibility to a thing, you can often see it clearly, can't you? But I don't know how good it is to see clearly, myself."

"Meaning?" I asked her. I was sitting out on the terrace; the sun was still hot; she had brought me a long drink with ice in it. The brindled wolf-dog sprawled, panting, at my feet.

"I wouldn't like to see too clearly," was all that she said before she went into the house. Perhaps she meant that if she saw me objectively, her devotion would be strained. Surely by now she had seen enough to strain it?

Presently I heard the awful noise of the car on the road. I remember now that he looked happy and young; that the dog came out of character to treat him as a friend and that we laughed together about the meeting at his house. Then we sat at the table on the terrace to read through the notes that he had brought.

First I concentrated upon the ludicrous threats concerning the blue-print; that it was well-known and of much interest to foreign Governments; that its comprehensive plans could teach the islanders the use of money in a few weeks; that there were direct channels of information between the supporters of the Claimant's case and foreign agents. None of these statements were substantiated and they looked to me like the boasts of megalomania. Julian was not as positive as I.

After a while, as he leaned beside me, his shoulder touched mine; and there must have been whole lines of the notes that I read without seeing them because the seat of consciousness had become, absurdly, the place on my upper arm that felt through the stuff of my own sleeve the stuff of his and the small, unimportant pressure. I thought that one of us would move in a moment; that neither of us need notice this touching; that it was accidental, that it did not matter. And after that I became aware that it was going on too long, that my consciousness of it was shared, and then I moved my arm.

"I must go," he said quickly.

"Yes; I have to change. Goodbye, Julian; thank you." Did I, I asked myself, imagine the look of thoughtless happiness on his face, the increased assurance of his manner? I thought that I did imagine it and I was ashamed of myself.

Peter came at dusk, still in uniform, as large, as gay, as simple as ever. It seemed that I had a great deal to tell him and my recollection is that I talked steadily until long after dinner was ended. When Peter is pleased with me, he lets me know it. Tonight as we sat on each side of the fireplace in the drawing-room, he said:

"I never get the hang of you, Valdes. When the Guardian left, I'd have said that you were bored and exhausted; that you would bury yourself here and shelve as many island affairs as you decently could. Instead, I find you shooting about between Tropic Side and Station X. I find you using Julian as a spy, unearthing peculiar suspicions about Orrey, and taking it upon yourself to test those plague-ridden fanatics at first hand; to say nothing of watching Gerlach at his revolting lab. work. All in all, exhibiting the liveliest possible interest in Leron. And looking very well on it and very beautiful. I love that dress."

It was one that you have loved, the Spanish sixteenth-century dress that is almost worn out. I said, "I must go into the Capital tomorrow, to Theresa. She has a whole wardrobe ready for me, waiting to be fitted."

"There again," said Peter, sprawling at ease, "you're odd. Your interest in clothes is spasmodic. I've seen you dressed like a gypsy and not caring. Most women care how they look all the time—or never."

Since Peter's current preoccupation is, as you know, a mannequin employed in Theresa's dress-house, he spoke with authority.

"Una," I said, "was deeply shocked because I received Julian when I was wearing an old shirt and trousers and sandals."

"Una still doesn't despair of keeping you in order?"

"No," I said, "at least I think her attitude could be summed up as 'I am defeated, but I refuse to capitulate'."

"If it weren't for the island Law, you'd be a Law to yourself, wouldn't you?" he asked.

"Of course I would."

First he smiled; then he frowned.

I can tell when Peter is about to say something that will irritate me. Perhaps because of our unfinished love, he is compelled now and then to talk roughly to me; to sound as though he were full of wisdom and I were not.

"All the same," he said, "I wouldn't, if I were you, undertake too much alone. It may be amusing, but the Council is still the most useful piece of machinery that we've got. Besides, you may get yourself talked about."

"That, I'm afraid, is not a consideration that worries me unduly."

"It shouldn't worry you unduly; it should be there."

(I could feel one of our old quarrels coming up out of nowhere. And I did not want it to happen. I was too vulnerable tonight; my nerves too taut with the discovery that I could share a secret with Julian and not tell it to Peter. With all that I had said, I had left out Teruel's name. Teruel, certainly, was Julian's own dark and private affair. But I thought that if I had seen Peter immediately after the episode at the pool, I should have told him about it.)

Peter's look of challenge suggested that he too saw a quarrel coming. I said "Agreed: that I should consider the island's view of me, but not worry about it unduly. And now would you like to play to me?"

He blew me a kiss before he went to the piano. From where I sat, I could see the candlelight on his gold hair, on the square, faithful forehead and blue eyes.

At first as he played, my thoughts went down into nothingness. He played "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring"; it was the water of a fountain eternally falling; there was no need for it ever to end. I did not want it to end. There are moments when music is all that the soul needs; and I have thought that it would be easy to die bravely to music. As Peter went from Bach to the island tunes, my eyes conjured your image; your head, your shoulders, the shape of your hands.

I went back to the time when I first loved you and saw your mind as though it were a mountainside that some day I would climb; and the mists are still on that mountain, I thought, and it towers in lonely arrogance and has no need of me.

But I went back, as the music played, to all my first hopes, trying to make them live again or at least be important again. And from there I swung straight over to the mood of hot rebellion that is rarely indulged, down into the vale of desolate detachment that I like least of all. And the chords carried me on to the stage of positive gaiety; wherein I do not see myself, nor you, nor the island, but some trivial immediate cause for joy. It was made now by the pattern of the music, but it can be the flight of a hawk or the taste of a strawberry or the look of the hill-town across the valley.

What was happening to me? I need not ask; I knew. In trying to escape a new fate that threatened, I was making a frantic effort to be more myself than ever—before the fate caught and changed me. I was assuming every aspect of me that I recognised. This person, for all her perplexity, might soon look safe. (In the same illusion with which the boy looks back at his childhood and sees that child as safe; with which the mature man looks back at his youth and sees that boy as safe. The past we can value; it is there and visible, hung for ever with a mirage of security as soon as we have gone from it.)

But tonight I felt as though I were poised between two tenses; on the edge of the future, not in it. Is it possible, I said to myself, that I shall forget these dangers and uncertainties in new dangers and uncertainties? That another "now" will presently make me afraid?

Peter stopped playing. The silence was still related to the music; neither of us broke it for a while. Then he came slowly to the fire and stooped and kissed my forehead.

"Valdes, I am full of fresh air and soldiering and a

good dinner; and it is late; I must go home to bed."

"Would you like to stay the night? Una can make up the bed. It's no trouble."

He hesitated. "I'd better not. It's a six-o'clock start tomorrow morning; I want to get every paper off my desk before the Advisers come in."

I went out with him, and after he had gone I stood listening to the river. Then I came in by way of the terrace; I looked across the valley and upwards, to find the one light that ranked with the stars, the light on the peak of Nôtre Dame des Rochers. Then I went back into the room. The notes of the music still seemed to hang here. Una's footsteps came from the kitchen.

"Aren't you going to bed, my lady?"

"No, not yet. Don't wait for me."

"Is there anything that you'd like?"

"Nothing at all, thank you."

"It's late," she said doubtfully.

"I know. I shouldn't sleep, though. I'll read for a little while."

"Ought to be sleepy. You've had a long day."

"Don't worry, Una. Did you like the music?"

"Yes, I always like to hear him play. And I like him to be here; somebody to look after you," she added inexplicably. "Good-night, my lady."

I heard the footsteps retreating on the stone floor, heard them mount the stairs and echo away along the passage above. Now it was very quiet here, except for the sound of the river. The curtains were still undrawn and, looking at the dark windows, I had a feeling that I have had before, but never in this house; only in our house in the North: that the whole island pressed against those windows and threatened me.

I rose and drew the curtains. I could look about the room now and feel protected. I let my eyes pause at the things that I liked: the gilded cherub, the carved ship,

the blue chairs. There is a reassurance, I thought, in things that have been there a long time.

In that mood I choose to read a classic that I have read before many times and its spell was still strong. I did not realise how deeply I was sunk in the story until the sudden noise of the dog barking outside made my whole body shake. I heard him run past the window, growling as he ran. Then I heard no more growling. I pulled back the curtains and opened the windows on to the terrace. There was enough light to see that a man was stooping above the dog, stroking his submissive head. I knew who the man was before he rose and faced me.

"What are you doing here?"

He did not answer.

"Why have you come back, Julian?"

"I had to."

"Why?"

"You were the only person I could tell. It's the end of the story." His voice was heavy and toneless; he stood still, with his arms hanging at his sides.

He began to frighten me.

"Come in," I said. "Don't do this."

He followed me into the room. Under the light he looked lost, beaten. "Now I see you," he muttered. "I can't imagine why I didn't stop to think; why it never occurred to me to go anywhere else. I've been walking for hours."

"What has happened?"

"They work fast, your friends up above. And two days ago my fear was that he'd live for ever. And I am glad; that's the worst thing."

"You must tell me."

"Oh, haven't I told you? Teruel was killed this morning; climbing White Wall."

It was a shock that left me a long time without words. When the words came, they were of the tritest. "Oh, Julian, I am sorry."

"Are you? I'm not. Not really. Perhaps I will be. I'm beginning to remember little things that hurt; only in the last half hour. At first it was just plain relief; and feeling winded, as though I'd never get my breath back."

I gave him a drink and he sat, holding it in his hand, not tasting it, staring at the floor; then he drained it.

"I keep looking both ways," he said, "yours and mine. Yours would be that God meant all of it. Mine would be that his death was just as much an accident as his birth was; that a short life like that is utterly pointless, meaningless, beginning nowhere, ending nowhere. And, by God, I'd rather have yours."

I thought, "He has dropped his respectful manner; now he moves to the sideboard to fill his glass without asking my permission; he is talking to me as to an equal. And I should not be ashamed for him that he is proving what a mere skin of good manners he has put on over his natural toughness; and I should not be glad, as though this new sort of meeting were what I wanted."

There were pictures of him in my mind: the bronzed ragamuffin straddling the wall of his father's house; the boy galloping his pony along South-West Beach; the youth with the heavy-lidded eyes; the dummy figure in the white coat, walking the floor of his rainbow-coloured room, bending to kiss my hand, making the gestures of his trade. The man who paced my floor was none of these, bore no relation to these.

"Tell me more about your God," he said. "No, don't. I've got to learn Him for myself, haven't I?" Then he stood still in the middle of the floor, watching me.

"Know the first thing that came into my mind when they said there was bad news?"

I shook my head.

"I thought something had happened to you."

I was silent.

"That is true. I can remember it going through my head; and thinking I wouldn't see you again."

I was back at the afternoon, at the moment when our shoulders touched. And I found that I could say nothing, that he could not, that the silence between us was unendurable, as the touching had been.

This, I thought, was the moment of departure. There were no longer two tenses. This was now.

VIII

I SAID to myself at the beginning, "The greatest astonishment to me is that there is peace in it. Why no sense of shame, no disgust, no knowledge of unfaith, only the feeling that this was inevitable? It has moments of complete paradox; as though for the first time I have moved on into mature understanding of all that I vowed in youth, to you and to Leron. As though in surrender I understand victory; in sin I understand grace. In the separation from all that I was, I see at last what I tried to be. I see it and respect it, where once I had only pity for the effort. Almost I can promise some day to return to that standard with more wisdom for having deserted it."

This mood was not wholly one of self-deception; nor in those early days did I feel differently towards you. You may not believe me, but your image in my mind remained clear, in the same equation as before. Of love, I said, I know three things. The first was the youthful pain with Peter; the second was my blind hero-worship of you; and the third is this, where the closeness of the flesh and the laughter are all.

Of the flesh, we say so often and so confidently that it is the least durable part of love. We underline to ourselves the truer worth of kindness or of mental companionship. It is more important, we say, that our brains and our beliefs should match than that our bodies should. There is some

truth in this. The whole truth is that where the link of the flesh is strong, it creates a meeting-place that the human animal seeks again and again, forgetting the other needs. I am sure that if our marriage had been based, for me, on my physical feelings towards you, there would have been a right beginning. I should have grown up gladly to the other needs. With you, I have never known the things that I have known with Julian.

Even now, looking back past disillusion, I can see that man and that woman who were Julian and I, at their true meeting-place. They look now like lucky strangers; and I can hear their voices, soft and heavy, in the dark. That is the thing, I said to myself at morning, that I must have again; from the beginning of passion that is somehow private and angry, to the tenderness and realisation, to the moment that cannot be described, that is the dark tower; the death of thought. And after it the peaceful recoil into laughter.

I said this on the first morning, alone; as yet neither free nor happy, because of the words spoken humbly, only half-heard through my sleep: "You need never see me again"; and when I awoke to their meaning, he was gone.

For a long time, sitting by the window, seeing the light sharpen the hills and the valley, I swung absurdly between two moods: mood of the Guardian's wife; mood of any woman who has been loved all night. The Guardian's wife was saying, "How dare he take it for granted that it was a madness and a mistake? I am not mad and I do not make mistakes. What right has he to this careful sense of guilt, this runaway wisdom? It is for me to say what happens next; for me and nobody else."

The woman who had been loved was not arrogant. She thought only, "All that I want if I am to survive, if I am to come out of this moment of cold that is like an illness or a slow strangulation, is to talk to him, be close to him.

"I have been alone too long, Julian, to be left alone again. That is your responsibility, to have made me feel at last

that I am not alone. The oneness and the safety, the things that I have never had before: you cannot give me those and then take them away. No matter what comes out of this, no matter what descent into hell began for both of us last night, the worst that you could do to me would be to unfinish our story here.

"But where can we go? What life can we make that is not an interrupted secret, kept from too small a world? That is not a panic chain of hidings and good-byes? How much of peace can we have? How much of time?

"And there is worse to come," I said, feeling the two moods knit and twist until I was neither wholly the Guardian's wife nor the woman loved by Julian, but myself, Valdes: "there is the end to come; the full-stop, the absolute finality of the Guardian's return. After that happens, we shall never again meet as we are. That will be death," I thought, looking at it calmly because I knew that it must happen and would happen. "So this life that we have begun now must be lived out. However arduous and anguishing, it will be better, easier than its end."

When I had faced that, I felt stronger. I heard Una's footsteps mount the stairs. As soon as she opened the door, I saw that she knew. Perhaps she had heard him go; perhaps she had been awake last night. It does not matter, I thought; Una has always known all that there is to know about me. We shall not talk, ever, nor can I tell from her look whether she is shocked or whether she is happy because she understands that this is what I want.

She said, "Don't go catching cold, now; the windows wide open and that thin dressing-gown. I'd better light the fire."

IX

IN my note, I asked him to meet me on South-West Beach. This will hurt you. It is the sort of detail in betrayal that matters most to the betrayed, that a place already shared should be shared again with another. I could think of nowhere else where we could be sure to be alone, except my house; and my restlessness was too acute to let me sit and wait for him.

As I came down through the hot white dunes, my feet brushing the stiff grass and the pink flowers, I did remember our meetings of long ago. How could I not remember them? Nothing that happened here now would relate to them or touch them. The past was set and invulnerable; the past was ours; and what came now, I felt, was shifting, precarious, belonging only to me.

I had come ahead of time on purpose. I had sent the car away, telling the driver to return in an hour, and I had thought that when its long black shape went out of sight along the sea-road I should feel safe; but I did not. I would not watch the road for him. I went down to the water's edge, to the flat sands that shone and the waves breaking.

The sky was too big; the lines of sunlit sea ran on for ever; and in my own soul I stood at the earliest edge of something that was without limit, without mercy as this was. The waves turned and turned, first the blue-green hollow topped with a thin silver line, then the proudly pouring foam that was like a mane, then the shallow sweep of the spent water losing itself in the sand. I went on watching them and felt myself grow smaller, more dazzled, more lost, with every moment that passed.

I did not hear his car at all. The first that I knew of him was a fish-hawk, ringing up out of the dunes and flying seaward, and then I saw that he was the disturber of the

hawk. He waved to me. He quickened his stride and I walked slowly.

Now I thought that he looked gay and composed, remote from me, remote from yesterday. It was alarming to see how many small things had become important, his red shirt, his bare feet in native sandals, the gold ring on the little finger of his left hand. I felt the shock that came from the completeness of the other person. In absence he was a haunting of my mind, a close possession. In physical presence, standing a yard from me, he was himself, utterly removed. This made of last night a profound mystery, a thing that could not have happened.

"I didn't mean to keep you waiting," he said.

"I meant you to. A precaution, in case the driver saw you."

He nodded seriously. My eyes took him in; brown skin, blue shadows, naked throat, lines of muscle; he was more vivid than ever in this light.

"I didn't expect this," he said, not coming nearer nor trying to touch me.

"What did you expect?"

"I can't quite remember. That sounds silly, doesn't it, not to remember how I felt before I got your note? But since then I've only thought question-marks."

"There are no question-marks as far as I'm concerned."

He looked less sure of himself.

"Did I dream it, Julian, or did you say 'You need never see me again?' "

"Yes, I said that."

"Why?"

He stared away from me to the sea. "D'you mean to say you don't understand why?"

"Oh, I suppose I do. You think that it happened because of Teruel; because I was sorry for you. That is the sort of thing, I believe, that one can think in the morning, in spite of all that was said at night."

"Have I any right to think anything else?" he said heavily, still looking away from me; he did not seem to expect an answer.

"I don't believe in rights. I don't think that anybody has any 'rights' at all; they are a kind of pompous illusion," I said.

"Are you laughing at me? I'm not very good at words, I know."

"It isn't that, Julian. But will you please, for a minute, try to forget that I am the Guardian's wife?"

"Not easy to forget."

"Last night it was."

"Last night"—he broke off and stared away again and then looked me in the eyes, half-smiling, half-frowning. "Look; I don't know what you've brought me here to tell you; I don't know what you want me to say. All I've got to say is that I love you. I love you so much that it's breaking me to bits."

I did not speak. I was content to stand there and know it. Here was peace.

"You can't love me," he was saying; "How could you? But last night was the only thing that's ever really mattered to me in my whole life. I'd like you to believe that."

I said, "Idiot. How can you not know I love you?"

X

ON the day that Julian buried his son, I went into the Capital to fit my clothes. It was one of those acts that seem brutally frivolous and are not. Since I couldn't share the thing that he had to do, it was more intelligent to send my thoughts and my prayers after him, send my body about its own business.

When I found that I was early for my appointment with

Theresa, I told my driver to go up Memorial Hill. I walked into the Senate as though I were a tourist. There were tourists there already; a group led by a guide, standing in a circle about the glass cases that hold the Declaration and the Charter. The tourists, I saw, were from the East; they had the collective look; plain, adequate clothes, earnest faces, flat feet. They gave the effect of coming from a place where there was a permanent shortage of personality; as though a group like this could produce between them just enough to make itself recognisable. Divide the group into single units, I thought, and it might disappear.

They stood there quietly appraising the beginnings of Leron. I left them, to stand under your portrait for a time. The eyes in the portrait remained fixed, unaware of me. I thought, as I have thought before, that the bare head above the white Council robes needed a circlet, a wreath of laurel. It was not you, the portrait, it was a flat symbol. I had thought that the sight of it would perhaps arouse the feelings of guilt that I should have, but nothing happened to my heart.

I strolled out into the gardens and on to the north steps. I could see the city end abruptly, with the river moating the last green at the foot of the hill. I looked across the white bridge that spanned the river and I saw the Forum. The sun made it a gleaming marble hollow scooped out of the green; the benches at this distance were mere veins of blue on the white marble; the tall pillars were fragile shafts against the sky. It has always the appearance of a Greek theatre. I cannot look at the Forum without hearing the echoes. There, I say to myself, they held the Trials; and my mind begins to fill the marble space with the crowd come to sit in judgment; I paint in the scarlet of the Court Advocate's robe upon the dais; I make the bronze bell sound, and through the door behind the dais I conjure the eight white figures of the Council walking slowly. It is a game that my imagination has played since youth. At any

assembly in the Forum, I have found that the scene of the Trial acts itself behind the true scene.

Below me on the steps the group of Eastern tourists stood in drab unison. They gave another impression now, the impression of being tethered. I wondered what they made of the island; what chance they had, on their carefully shepherded excursions, to make anything of it at all.

I had stood here often, making little of it myself, aware of it only as a prison of dedication that must go on and on. Today the mood was different. The mood was one of lucid acceptance. I could have stayed here a long time, awake with loving, knowing that I was loved, brimful of peace and quietly compassionate.

I was free, I had escaped; I was bound no longer. The new paradox was of course built on the old weakness; the tender feeling towards the thing that I have left. But I did not realise it then. I knew only that I was happy. I found so much peace here alone that I did not want to move; to risk its dispersal by contact with my sister-in-law Theresa seemed foolish.

"How often this happens, though," I thought. "One sets too little value upon silence and solitude." I lingered past the hour of appointment and I said a prayer here for Teruel, though I did not believe that his soul needed my prayers. He has gone up that mountain, I thought, to the real unfolding of his destiny. What happens here, the prelude, was made so short for him that the transition cannot be difficult. He is now as he was meant to be. And I wished that Julian could see this, believe this.

Theresa kept me waiting. Peter, as you know, says of her that she would make an efficient Mother Superior and that she runs the dress-house as though it were a convent. All the more remarkable, he adds, since she and her young women work upon the most frivolous of occupations. "I don't know," I thought, "why to design and make clothes for women is regarded as a frivolous occupation. Men's

clothes, however decorative, are not looked upon as frivolous; you wouldn't say that of the tailors, Peter. Perhaps, since your relationship with the girl who works here, you have given up saying that this is a trivial matter and that all the demurely-bent heads of the young women, as they stitch and cut, make you think of nuns vowed to the cause of nonsense.

"You are partly right, though. The low-voiced, exquisite creature who left me here might well have left me in the visitors' room at a convent; the room with the Sacred Heart and the Virgin and the Crucifix, and the ash-tray that is a surprise; as though one never expected nuns to know that people smoked.

"And this long wait is the same," I thought, "as if Theresa were saying a decade before she came downstairs. Instead, she is walking between the avenues of industrious young women, with a clutch of designs and patterns in her hand. And when she opens the door we shall each have the small shock of impact, the moment of remembering how little sympathetic we find each other; and we shall kiss determinedly and work away at the semblance of affection."

The door was opening now. Theresa billowed, in a long blue gown; all curves and highlights, with the braid of hair like a halo across the top of her head. Our cheeks touched, our hands brushed each others' shoulders lightly, we withdrew; we smiled.

"But how *well* you look," she said. "Quite beautiful, and wonderfully well."

As a rule I am aware of the eyes like blue marbles; the sunny Olympian approval or the statuesque, unspoken condemnation; aware often of the family presence that would, if it could, profane my secret thoughts. And I have been glad in the past to realise that Theresa is afraid of me. Today I made the astonishing discovery that she had lost her powers. She was just my sister-in-law; towards whom I felt a comfortable friendliness.

"I hear you were at Tropic Side, looking lovelier than anybody in the room."

(That twinge under my ribs on the left is a new reaction to the words "Tropic Side", I thought. I savoured it.)

"A pretty thought," I said. "But I've just woken up to the fact that I'm sick of the sight of every garment I possess."

"Oh, I remember feeling like that, when I was in love," said Theresa.

I looked at her carefully and saw that there was no guile here. How could there be? And it amused me to find that Theresa and I could react similarly to any situation.

"Why are you laughing?"

"I'm not."

"Your eyes are. I was in love, terribly in love; once. He was the eldest Cyriax, the one in the Secretariat. You'd never think, to look at him now, how handsome he was; would you?"

"No," I said. "He looks like a boiled chicken."

"Well, perhaps he wasn't so handsome, really," Theresa sighed: "Perhaps it was just because he wore Legion uniform and took some notice of me. Not that I've ever wanted a husband, you know I haven't."

"Certainly not. If you'd wanted one, you'd have had one."

She tossed her head contentedly. "And are you very lonely now he's gone? I must say you don't look lonely. Do you know something?" she said. "I used not to like you at all."

"That's all right, Theresa. I didn't like you, either."

"No, I know you didn't. It's fascinating," she said, "how used I get when I don't see you to the idea that I still dislike you; and the moment that I see you, I say to myself, 'Of course, that's all over; that was a long time ago.'"

"I am glad," I said, "that I improve with presence. It's so much easier to improve with absence. Shall we go to the fitting-room?"

"One minute." She was looking positively pop-eyed. "Do you know why I didn't like you?"

"No, Theresa. Does there have to be a 'why' about these things?"

"Perhaps not. But there was. It was because you came from the South; you seemed to me a sort of foreigner; you weren't like us. And I thought you laughed at us inside. And when both my brothers fell in love with you, one after the other, I was furious. I couldn't understand why they didn't see that you were laughing. You weren't, of course; I know that now. But I thought you were."

She expected me to say words that would come to meet her confession. But there were none. I had disliked her instinctively, without knowing why. I pondered what she had said. "A foreigner. Yes; I suppose in a way I am. My ancestry doesn't stand up to close examination. Dubious types, tarnished aristocracy, come late to Leron," I said, "I do see how it would gash you."

"Well, but, naturally, it doesn't any more." She put her arm around my waist. "Come and see the dresses now. They really are lovely and they have been waiting so long."

XI

THE time telescopes when I look at it. I know that seven weeks passed between the day of your going and the final thing that happened between Julian and myself. But from here the scenes and the events are all superimposed, one on another.

There is the meeting at night, the subterfuge; the love and the laughter; then a scene when I am alone, in Council or talking to Peter, haunted by the more vivid thoughts in my head, not daring to let my body remember too much; and then the vivid thoughts of the haunted woman become the

true record of the next meeting, and then there is being alone again. It is as rapid as blinking, I cannot make it come back in its own tempo. The house was very much a part of it. Always after the day on South-West Beach he came to my house, not I to his. And Una and I found a way of talking about it that was not talking, as we have done for other things.

I stop my mind at the evening with Orrey on the tower.

Julian was jealous of all; of every ceremony or routine that came into my programme, of the times and the places that he could not share. And there were many of these. It was always I who established the moments when we could meet, the intervals when we could not. I was so much used to setting the clock for us that on the day when he said, "Tonight isn't possible," I felt an outraged sense of desolation.

"Yes, it is. It must be. I have nothing to do," I said.

"I have, alas."

"What is it? Throw it away."

"I can't, my love—I have to be at Tropic Side."

"Well, all right: I'll come to Tropic Side. I haven't been there for weeks; it will do me good."

"No, Valdes. We sha'n't have a minute to talk. Don't come, please." He turned over and lay close to me and held my hand, pressing it against his heart. "I'll come to you afterwards; late."

"What have you to do?" I asked coldly.

He said that Van Dorn was coming. Van Dorn, as you probably know, is among the Western operators who make money out of Tropic Side; one of the new millionaires. His yacht would tie up there today. Julian would have to give him dinner and talk business.

"All right," I said, as amiably as I could. "You get rid of him when you can, and come afterwards."

So I was enormously pleased at six o'clock, as I pored over Council papers on the terrace, to hear that step and to

feel those hands on my shoulders. I leaned back my head, silently, gratefully.

"But it isn't only a visit of love," he said. He told me about Orrey.

Orrey was there again, he said, at five o'clock, sitting at one of the tables in the open-air bar that overlooks the harbour; drinking with his face to the sun. I could see him as Julian talked; the hunched, strong shape of him and the eyes deliberately dazzled; the hands that are like your hands.

He had let Julian come to the table without a greeting; he had said, staring at nothing: "Some day an end of it all." Then, when Julian said "An end of what?" Orrey sighed and did not speak. After that he drew his finger down the middle of his forehead and talked about there being "Yes" on one side of it and "No" on the other.

He would not explain it; he said that it was self-explanatory, that if you lived all the time with Yes in one side of your head and No in the other, you ended up mad. "I'm mad," he said to Julian, "and nobody guesses." And after that, he began to move his hand as though he were turning the wheel on the tower; saying, "It's a pouring movement, you know: five degrees—flash; interlock-shift; ten degrees—flash; interlock-shift." and he went on doing that for a long time. Presently he laughed and finished his drink and said, "You don't know how it feels up there alone."

"And how does it feel?" Julian asked him.

"Like God, with the devil whispering at you," said Orrey. Then he got up and went.

"It's the worst I've seen or heard from him yet," Julian said to me. "When it comes to God and the devil, of course I'm interested. Two months ago I wouldn't have been. You've sold me God and the devil, darling. What does Orrey mean?"

"How can I tell? I gave Scansen the warning you gave me. He assures me that Orrey does his work as usual and seems perfectly normal."

"Damn it, Valdes, he isn't. He's mad; and the thought of a madman on the control-tower scares me stiff, even if it doesn't worry Scansen."

"All right, darling. I'll call Scansen later."

"Why does he talk to me," Julian wondered, "if he doesn't talk to anybody else?"

"I suppose he feels free on Tropic Side."

That reminded him of to-night. "Free on Tropic Side, hell. Shut up with Van Dorn. Wasting you. And we've got so little time."

I put my hand over his mouth: "You mustn't say that ever."

"It's true, though."

"Hush."

We sat, holding each other's hand on the table, looking across the valley.

"I love you, darling. Wait for me." His mouth touched mine and he went.

XII

THERE are, as you know, only two places on the island that can make me afraid. They are the two places that make you afraid. One is Station X and the other is the Mine.

I was afraid of the Mine when I was a child; and there is still a horror to me in the sight of the yellow-green rock plateau. The five towers are ugly monsters and the military strong-points forming the outer wall suggest an immense prison-encampment. Always when I come here by day, I have to look inland, to see the mountain range and the summit of White Wall and to feel reassured by that far beauty. But still my eyes come back. There is something horribly compelling in the plateau with its man-made mole-hills, the five towers, the hunch of the encircling rocks.

After dark I find it almost beautiful, when only a skeleton frame of lights identifies the plain, and the ghostly towers gleam skyward. But I am not at ease with it and I would not have gone to the place that night had it not been for the restlessness of waiting for Julian. I embarked on the adventure with the sole purpose of kicking time out of the way.

I did not let Scansen know that I was coming. I dressed in men's clothes, with a long dark coat that came almost to my heels. This was too much for Una. She didn't even ask, "Where are you off to now?" Nor did I tell her.

I made the driver stop before we reached the first strong-point on the outer gate. As I reached it, I was challenged by a Legion guard. His voice rasped out of the blackness like the bark of a dog. I saw the faint gleam on his helmet, the line of light along his rifle.

I held out the gold seal of the Council. Awed, he let me through.

I had forgotten the sulphurous, metallic smell. I stood still, sniffing it, remembering how much I hated this place. The track to the control-tower lay ahead of me, as broad and smooth as an airport runway, with arc lights hanging over it. Half-way to the tower I was challenged again. Three Legionaries were walking together. The greenish light of the arcs took all colour from their faces and uniforms.

They were highly respectful at once, offering to escort me. I thanked them and said that I would go on alone. The sulphurous smell was still here; it was all-pervasive, like the scent of the one flower on Tropic Side. This, I said to myself absurdly, is Scansen's Tropic Side; he rules here as Julian does there. Idly, as the feet of the soldiers echoed away, I set Julian in my mind beside the men of the Council; beside Pendean at Main Harbour, Scansen here and Tribe at Station X. It brought him nearer.

I had come to the tower. I stood, looking up. Seen thus, it looked like a mad tree of metal, fragile and furious,

lashed with the wind of its own green light. The scarlet beams from the other towers swung at it rhythmically, pierced the green and fell away.

"Orrey's up there," I thought. "Turning the wheel, with God in his head and the devil at his ear." For a moment I was coldly afraid, wishing that I had not come. Then I told myself not to be a fool. I stepped into the lighted doorway. I saw the circular steel stairs circling the elevator-shaft; seated on their lowest step there was a man in overalls, drinking from a mug. He looked sleepy and friendly. He blinked at the gold seal, then made a clumsy gesture, half a bow and half a nod.

"Want me to take you up, Ma'am?"

"No," I said, "I've been here before."

"You just press the button," he said.

The speed of the elevator made my ears click. It did not, I remembered, go all the way to the top. The last of the steel staircase led from here to the platform. Now I could hear the noise of the wheel.

I walked into Orrey's kingdom.

It was a long time since I had seen it. I saw it differently now; saw it as a green glass cage perched aloft, pierced at thirty-second intervals by the scarlet signal flashes. Yes, the flashes were like spears, I thought; they beset and beleaguered the room in the tower, changing the colour of the monstrous, smooth-running wheel, the man motionless save for his hand.

"A pouring movement," he had said to Julian. I stood still and counted. Five degrees—flash; interlock-shift; ten degrees—flash; interlock-shift. The delicate touch of Orrey's finger-tips made it look easy.

Here, I thought, one might well go mad, with the run of the wheel, the rhythm of the flashes, the sense of the cage. And the solid floor felt as though it were turning too. It throbbed, certainly it throbbed, like the deck of a ship. I began to feel dizzy, unbalanced; as though there were

nothing to hold me; as though the tower might fall. And if it fell, these lights would still be here, the flashes meeting at the point where the cage had hung.

How did it look down there, I wondered, the Lake itself? That, I should never know. (The dark surface that was agitated and boiling now with the piston-movement of the long steel pumps, the dark sea far down.) It was easier to think three hundred feet higher, to the things that I had seen, the wide rock shelves where the tanks were filling; to picture the steady machinery at its work, all along the dark tunnels below the plain. It is sent into action by the men on the towers, I said to myself, by the control-tower, by one man on the control-tower, by one man's hand.

Twenty-five degrees—flash; interlock-shift.

"Good-evening, Orrey," I said.

"Good-evening. Oh, Valdes," he smiled at me. "Yes, I thought that one of you would be here soon. I'm glad it's you."

"Why did you think one of us would come?"

He said, "To tell me it's over."

I was silent.

"Tell me, Valdes. I can listen while I'm doing this. See how easy it is? I can talk; I can read; I can think. It is only my hand that keeps humanity safe for a day."

I watched the butterfly touch of those fingers. Then I watched the line of small, lighted discs on the board beside the wheel. Each of them must say something. They changed all the time; numbers and fractions and degrees, and one was a kind of spirit-level that rose and fell. Orrey didn't seem to look at them.

"Go on," he said, "tell me it's over."

"What is over?"

He laughed. "I meant the end of the experiment. The end of the Regime. The end of the island."

"Oh, Orrey," I said gently. "How could it be? Why are you afraid of that?"

He looked at me; his large light eyes were blind. "I'm not afraid of it, Valdes. I pray for it."

"Supposing you tell me why?"

"Because no man has the right to take his responsibility for granted. Even on Leron. And you take it for granted; and the Guardian does; and the Council does. And I can't," he said softly.

I found that my ears had absorbed and accepted the humming noise of the wheel. Now I could hear the wind over it, bumping against the tower outside. The returning flashes had become a part of the cage itself, not a set of spears thrown against frail defences. The dizziness had gone from my head and I no longer noticed the throbbing of the floor. All of me was concentrated upon Orrey, alone with his private demon.

"We aren't God," he said. "Sometimes I think I am, because I'm up here. And sometimes I really am, but that's not to be told. When I'm God, I know that Leron has no rights, no rights at all. And one night when I know for certain that I'm always going to be God, I shall smash the wheel to pieces."

"What good will that do?"

He looked at me slyly now: "Oh, it won't do any good. It will be a gesture; a gesture of ruin, Valdes."

"I think," I said, "that you are very tired."

"How can I be tired? I spend five hours a day moving one hand. But if you," he said—"if all of you will admit that we aren't the owners of the Lake, then I needn't even do that. Couldn't you admit it and let me come down?"

"Dear Orrey, if we handed the Lake and the Mine over to the world, that would mean only that someone else was in possession. Taking his responsibility for granted. Don't you see?"

"I wouldn't mind. It wouldn't be me any more. The two sides of my head could join up."

"We don't really own Leronite. We only control it," I

said. "If God wanted the Lake to dry up tomorrow, He could do that and we couldn't stop Him."

"All right," said Orrey, his voice quieter than ever. "But if I'm God, I needn't wait, need I? I can smash the wheel now."

"Of course you can."

"Could you lift that steel bar, do you think? The bar that goes across the door when the tower's shut; it's leaning against the wall."

"Certainly," I said, "I could lift it."

"Will you give it to me, then?"

"Of course I will. In a moment." I had to think and I couldn't think. The only way to get the relief up to the tower was to talk through the dial to Scansen's room. And the dial was on the board in front of Orrey.

"I'm glad," Orrey said, "that we are going to break it together. Why do you wait?"

(When he draws his eyebrows together, I thought, they make the vertical line between; he is more than ever like you. The inconsequent play of mind gave me sudden calm. And in the calm I could think.)

"Because it's no longer necessary," I said.

"Yes, it is. You know nothing."

I laid a hand on his shoulder. "Orrey," I said, "you don't really believe that I've come here for no reason, do you?"

He frowned more deeply. "I don't think I care. Bring the bar now."

"Wait. Have I ever come before like this? At night? Alone?"

Still he frowned. "No . . . you never have," he said at last.

"Why do you think I've come?"

He waited.

"Because your guess was right. It is over. I came to tell you. The Adviser will be here as soon as I give him word; he's only waiting for it."

"Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Why did you pretend it wasn't?"

"I didn't know how much it meant to you. Forgive me."

"Do you swear it's true?"

"I swear it. We have signed as the world wanted us to sign. There will be no more Regime on Leron after midnight; an hour from now."

"Thank God," he said.

"Keep your hand on the wheel for just a few minutes more. As soon as I talk to Scansen, he'll bring the relief up here. And then you're free."

He said nothing; but the movement of his hand went on.

"This is God's truth, Valdes?"

"Yes."

"If it were not, if you were telling me a lie, do you know what I would do?" he said. "I would kill you here."

The humming of the wheel came back to my ears; the red lights were again the dangerous lances and the floor shook.

"If you don't believe me," I said, "I'll prove it. Let me talk to Scansen."

"I'll talk to Scansen myself."

"No."

"You say No. Why?"

"Because—forgive me, Orrey—I am still, until an hour from now, entitled to give you orders."

I waited.

He said, "Yes, of course you are, Valdes. I am sorry. Speak to him."

I pressed the switch below the dial and held the receiver to my ear; I was surprised at the steadiness of my hands.

"Is that you, Scansen? Yes, I'm on the tower. I've just broken the news to Orrey, and you are to bring the relief here. Do you understand? Immediately. There can be no question of asking him to stay here now that it's all over. Will you please be quick?"

I will say for Scansen that he put his voice down to a whisper at once. I suppose that the fact of my presence here was unusual enough to frighten him. "I don't understand," the whisper said, "but I'll be there with the relief in five minutes."

Now I smiled at Orrey. He smiled back. I stood beside his shoulder, watching the wheel, watching the board, waiting through all the hours that those five minutes were, for the sound of the steel lift rising to the top of the tower.

XIII

HE said again, "How frightened were you?" as though there could be an exact sum of fear, and I was hedging on the figures.

"I've told you, darling. I don't know now. Fear begins to seem unfounded at the moment when it stops. And once you can say to yourself 'There was nothing to be afraid of after all,' you're already telling you that you weren't really afraid.

Still he knelt with his arms stretched out over my knees, his hands clasped, looking up into my face.

"Stop looking agonised, my love. It's over."

"What did you think, while you were waiting?"

"Everything," I said, "and nothing. There was one minute when I nearly made the bargain with God. I mean I almost said 'If you'll bring me through this, I'll be good for ever'. Almost, not quite. And there was half a prayer, repeating. First it stuck in the middle and kept going back to the beginning again. And after a while when I remembered the end, I didn't dare go on; I kept going with the half. Absurd feeling," I mused, "that if I stayed within the compass of the words already said, I was safe; because that had worked up till now, nothing had happened yet. If I went

on into new words, I might make it happen. It's hard to explain, that one."

"And then?"

"The odd thing is that though I can remember the noise of the lift, it all stops there. I can't remember the look of them coming up the last step on to the platform. It's like something told to me, not something that I saw. And after that it was just feeling ill and not letting them see that I felt ill; pretending that I was only drinking Scansen's brandy out of compliment to Scansen."

Julian sighed exasperatedly.

"Well, you know," I said, "how much I mind about those things."

He laid his head in my lap: "All I know is that arrogance is a word I've learned from you; and it fits you perfectly. You were insane to go there."

"No. I was curious, and I was restless; and so it happened."

"Will you swear to me——"

"No, I won't. Whatever it is, I won't swear."

"And I won't have your doing those things."

"I've always done them. And it isn't for you to give me orders."

Though his eyes laughed a little, his mouth did not.

"Valdes, the less you talk that way, the better."

"Certainly. So the less you compel me to talk that way, the better. Poor Orrey——" I said. "'Oh, what a noble mind' is exactly the epitaph."

"A noble mind?"

—"Is here o'erthrown." Shakespeare."

"Thank you. Pity about my lack of education, isn't it?"

"If you are going to get into that frame of mind, darling, I shall request you to leave."

"I love you."

"Well, don't say it as though you wished that you didn't."

"I'll never wish that. I only wish—and the thing that happened tonight has made it worse."

"What?"

"Time—time—time," he said, growling the word. "A place where we could be. And not have to part."

"I want it too."

"If we could get off the island; get on a boat, even for a week. Steal Van Dorn's yacht; I don't know. It's all I think about. Having you to myself. Not having to share you with the Council and the Senate and the Capital and the whole blasted framework of Leron." He sat back on his heels, staring at me angrily.

"I couldn't leave the island. Even for three days."

"I know you couldn't. Oh, my love, you are tired out and I batter at you." He got up and put his arms around me. "Come to bed. Or would you rather I went now and left you in peace?"

"I would not."

I had begun to think about the North-East and to wonder whether we should be safe there. I did not want to speak of it until I was sure in my mind that we could be.

XIV

WHY the compulsion for us to go away, to be together somewhere else? We were at our safest in my house. He could have come there for three days; it would have meant sending off old Jacques and his wife on a sudden holiday, but that would have been easier to do than the thing that we decided to do. There is the mood of love that demands to go, to be away, without pause to think from what it is running, to what goal it runs. And it seems foolish now for us to have indulged the mood, knowing as we did that we could never escape and that we must always come back.

The North-East has for me a feeling of romantic purpose that is lacking in the North-West. I know how much you

love the wooded hills where our house is; the sea-mists at morning and the clear afternoon. But to me there is a sadness in that air; a faded beauty, an eternal autumn.

On the other side, where the coastline hardens, where the iron-bound cliffs and the black rock pinnacles slant up towards Cape Farewell, I have never felt it. The grey granite of the northern town holds some secret for me, a secret that I cannot identify nor discover. We have talked of this before. From the sea, where you and I have gone out with the fishermen, the town makes an amphitheatre above the harbour and it is hard to tell, we say, where the houses begin; they seem to be growing out of the rock. You know its look; how beyond the grey town the pastureland slopes up into the crags; and over the crags there rises the shining pyramid of White Wall. It was here, where you and I have climbed, that I came with Julian; to the hut beneath the snowline.

The tragedy of Teruel was still echoing from this place, yet he wanted to be here with me; more, he said, than he wanted to be anywhere else. "If I've been there with you I'll never be afraid to go there again."

I had to meet him there. We could not go together. I gave him the key of the hut; he was to go through the mountains, as far as the pass by day and up to the hut itself under the cover of the dark; and wait there a day for me. I told Peter that when I visited the North-East I should stay to do a little climbing and a little fishing. "Alone?" Peter said. "Of course, alone. I'd so much rather. Back the day after tomorrow."

I went north by sea, and it was a rough sea. The boat that carried me was the fastest of the Coast Patrol fleet; the boat that they say can make records in any weather. I liked it; I liked the thud of our hull upon the hard waves meeting us; the fountain of spray at our bows and the creamed wake roaring back astern. I think that on this voyage I understood the worship of speed. At dawn when

we sailed the skies were dull, but by noon they were blue; the granite town sparkled; the sun was as strong as the wind.

I stepped ashore into the welcome; the tanned faces; the blue jerseys; the black shawls; the rough hands touching mine. Peter has described the North-East as being "all fish and rocks and people who don't talk", and he thinks it odd that I from the South should find it sympathetic. But it isn't really odd. There is huge vitality here, however rough and strange.

Since it was Sunday I went to the noon Mass in the church on the harbour. I kneeled among them all, hearing the slow voices answer faithfully, watching the priest's decorous, complete movements at the altar. When the bell rang for the *Domine Non Sum Dignus* and the clumsy fisher-boy flopped down on his knees to say the *Confiteor*, there was a great rustle and movement; there were only a few of us who did not go up to receive the Host. The inevitable regret stole over me as I watched them coming back, with their bowed heads and folded hands. I have had it before, with so much less cause; the sense of deprivation. Now I tasted that on my tongue, and only that.

But when the hour was over, when I came out into the sun, I was already impatient. Thank God, I said to myself, that they plan no ceremonies here. I could not bear formality nor public attitudes today. I spent half an hour with the fishermen's wives as they mended the nets in the sun. All the white frilled caps shook and the brown fingers moved and the black nets whispered. And I heard of the progress of a son at school, of a fish with two heads, of the track of a storm that broke the boats from their moorings. And then it was time to go up with the guide.

He was one of their speechless brown boys, with hair that was almost white. We went first through the network of streets called the Narrows, passing between stone walls with the trees in heavy leaf above them, passing the kitchen-

gardens and lines of washing, blown colours in the wind; out on to the road that curls up towards the pasture. Now we had our backs to the sea. The East face of the mountain glittered, enormous in the afternoon light. It was a magic threat, hanging far above the patchwork fields. The corn was turning gold; the gold and green chequer-board tilted to the foot of the crags; and after that there was no more that man had done; only the black rock, the great white bearskin of the glacier and the unreality of that silver peak.

I could follow the line that you and I once took to climb the East face. I knew every stone of it, scree and bergschund, chimney and rock-ribbon; the place where we put on the rope; the beginning of the ice where the steps are cut; the ridge and the last long pull to the summit.

I shall not climb White Wall again, I thought as we crossed the pasture; it was once a sword of challenge in the sky and the sword is still held up, but not for me; and I wondered if that was how Teruel had felt, and from there to wondering if the mountain fever is as noble as some make it or as foolish as others would make it. And then we were over the last slope and the wooden hut was there, marvellously neat on its green knoll; a toy house whose shadow lengthened. The evening was coming fast and the air was already cold.

"All right," I said to the boy. "Leave me here." I held out my hand to him for the pack.

"Please. They said you were going to climb tomorrow." He sounded disappointed.

"Well, I may. But I told them that I needed no guide; except to carry my pack as far as the hut."

"I remember when you climbed the East face with the Guardian," he said.

"Could you remember? It must be more than ten years ago."

He insisted that he did. He wanted to carry the pack

to the door, but I made him strap it on my shoulders.

I watched him go, lightly across the pasture. He reminded me in his movements, as in his slanted eyes, of one of the neat, slim goats that feed here. It was true mountain silence, this, I thought, and it would go on about us all night. I went up over the knoll to the hut and Julian opened the door and drew me in.

There was absolute peace between us on that evening. All the violent moods were quieted. I cooked our dinner and we ate it by the fire and drank red wine and watched the night come. There was a childish delight in possessing our own square wooden house. We knew that nobody would come here tonight or tomorrow; that no message could reach us. We had annexed a night and a day and another night and run up our flag over them.

We kept looking at the time and reminding each other how little of it was gone, how much we had left. And we stayed by the fire longer than we wanted to stay, for the pleasure of looking forward; and we talked of nothing but ourselves; we did not even talk of Teruel. There were still so many moments of each other's life that neither knew; so many trivial adventures lit with importance because they had happened to me or had happened to him. Each was thirstily asking not to be shut out from one memory, to be told all. "We are very much alike," I remember saying at one moment and Julian shouted with laughter: "*That's* what you yourself would call making me in your own image. I've never been so flattered."

"Can't you see it?"

"Let me try. Well, we've both got brown eyes and bad tempers."

"And?"

He was stretched out beside the fire, he saw that I watched him and he looked aware of his own beauty. "We like the same things in bed and we like to laugh. That's all we have in common."

"I don't think so, Julian."

"I do. But it doesn't prevent our being a good team. It may be that that makes us a good team." He lay, still in the pose that was complacent, saying, "You and I could do anything."

"What, for example?"

"Anything we wanted. I think I've caught your arrogance," he said. "It's a good germ to catch."

"You weren't the most modest and retiring of men before this happened. Don't forget I've looked at you over the years on Tropic Side."

"And don't forget I've looked at you, too. But at this moment, I warn you, I'm getting beyond looking."

"So am I."

XV

We did climb the next day, not by the East face, but over the scree to the South side, to eat our lunch on the pass. Afterwards we lay on our backs on the hot turf and here we talked of Teruel.

"It's losing a whole piece of oneself that matters," he said. "I didn't think it would. He'd been nothing but a plague for so long. But now I keep feeling as if somebody had stolen something of mine and that they ought to put it back. Oh, Valdes, I wish we could have a child."

"And I wish it."

"Maybe we will."

"I've thought of that."

"It would be the answer, wouldn't it?" he said.

"Answer to what?"

"To us," said Julian, "to the island. To what's going to happen when he comes back."

"How could it possibly be the answer?"

His hand stretched out to find mine and hold it.

"Then you'd have to come with me for always, wouldn't you?"

"Come where, Julian?" I was a little sleepy and I saw a preposterous image of myself living with him on Tropic Side, acting hostess every night in the glass palace, while the foreign crowd gossiped about us at their tables: "She was the Guardian's wife; they deposed her for adultery and she was divorced and she married Julian."

"Come where? Into the world," he said. "Where else could we go?"

He said it gaily; he sat up and let go of my hand, hugging his knees, gazing down the mountain-side towards the South.

He said, "We'd go West. And we'd build. And we'd get rich. As rich as Van Dorn. Or richer. I've told you, you and I could do anything. 'Rule the whole Western hemisphere if we wanted to.'"

I felt as though he had stretched up an idle brown arm and put out the sun. There was no need for me to say a word; he was launched on his dream.

"I've always wanted it. Always. And I've been too lazy to pull out from here. I could have gone years ago. I remember a man like Van Dorn, in my father's time—forgotten his name; I was sixteen and he offered me a job and I'd have taken it, but my father stopped me. And I've fooled myself so often since, thinking, 'Well, Tropic Side is the world; or nearly. You call the tune to the men of the West and that's good enough for anybody, surely?'"

"But it isn't. I'm still cramped and caged by the island Law; like you. And a few thousand miles away there's freedom, there's fun, there's money, there's everything. Everything that's exciting. Everything that's new. And we could go there, you and I. And we damn well will."

No, I thought; this is not possible; it is an over-elaborate joke; a knockabout game with words.

"I'll take you into the world with me. I know that. Even if we have to wait for years. I know it'll happen. We'll make it happen."

(He has never been there, I told myself; it lures him only because he has never been there. There is nothing strange in his wanting to go.)

"Won't we, Valdes?"

I looked at it and thought about it. All my married life I have known this, that if I truly wanted to escape, to rid myself of the imprint of your personality that you have laid on me as you have laid it on Leron, I should have to go into the world. There would be no other refuge for that runaway.

We have travelled there together, you and I. I have seen nothing there to love. But for years it has been the last resort of a mind in an agonising dream of escape. I have been able to put a stop to the thoughts that I would rather not think, by saying to me: "You could always go. If you could bear it no longer, you could get into a ship and sail for the West and never see Leron again.

The consolation that many an unhappy child has given itself: "I can always run away and go to sea." No more than that? And the intention," I said to myself now, "no truer than that? Here is the last secret hope of my heart, brought out into the open, held up to me by Julian; 'It is yours,' he says, 'it is mine. I'm still cramped and caged by the island Law, like you. We'll go.'"

He means it—and I? I see my secret now as a fantasy; a fantasy, created not by an adult woman, but by the small deplorable prisoner of whom I have spoken; the child within.

It was coldly stunning; the knowledge that you had won, that Leron had won, that, for all the tearing of my love, there lived for ever a force that must defeat it. And the knowledge was secured by Julian himself; looking into that distance and longing for it; longing to be rich, admitting

that he had found comfort in thinking "Tropic Side is the world—or nearly;" setting so little store by Leron that he cursed his own laziness in not leaving it long ago. Well, here was the knife that would cut our bond, and to give extra weight to the cliché, the knife had two edges. They were made of the place where my heart was and the place where his heart was.

For long minutes, lying still, staring into the sky, it was not Julian whom I hated, but you. I saw that your impulse, driving on, had taken more of me with it than I ever guessed. I was not now the person I had imagined myself to be; unwillingly loyal, truant at heart. That person, who had steadily diminished her own integrity in your service, in the island's service, was so much changed that I should never get her back again. Out of her labours a new woman with a new integrity had been made, or was in the process of making. I hadn't noticed her; I had been too busy looking back. Years had gone by without my seeing that while she acquired dimensions of truth, her nostalgic predecessor became more and more a fantasy.

Is it that we renew ourselves like skins, shed the old selves and do not know that we have shed them?

Now she belonged, that second Valdes whom I had not acknowledged, with all the other victims of my own weakness, those whose worth I do not guess until I have left them.

It was true; I had left her. I had betrayed her, as I had betrayed you, by loving Julian. And when I tried to look at the person I had become in these last weeks, I was lost. There was nothing here but my love, weeping alone because it had torn one pattern of living across and could not make another.

Worst of all the moments on that mountain-side was the moment of hating me.

XVI

"WE'LL go, won't we, Valdes?"

I made him an answer that could not have been reassuring, but I must have put some skill into it because we did not quarrel then. All my strength was concentrated upon my tears, that must stay behind my eyelids and not fall. You never see me weep and I was determined that Julian should not. After a time it grew easier and presently it was over. We took hands and went down the pass.

You will hear, tomorrow, how he and I were seen together in every imaginable place and circumstance; that the islanders regularly saw my car drive to his house at dusk and take me home at dawn. You will hear that I paraded him in the streets of the Capital and took him with me to Ste Croix. They are saying that we spent a week together cruising off the coast in a Western yacht; that we visited Station X and the Mine; that I invited members of the Council to meet him and that some accepted. In fact the only time that we were seen together was this time in the North-East. (Yet why do I trouble to underline the fact? In essence all that they say is true; all that they say is, "She betrayed you with him.")

The brown boy who had been my guide was waiting at the hut. We saw him as we came down the last slope. He was not alone; there was a girl of his own age and an older boy. The girl had cracked a bone in her wrist while climbing; they had come here to get bandages. They understood the orders that I had given: "But I knew," the boy said, "that you wouldn't be angry." All three of them, even the girl in pain, watched Julian out of the corner of their eyes with the liveliest curiosity.

"That's done it," he said as soon as they were out of sight.

"I don't think that they could know who you are."

"Doesn't matter. They went into the hut. They saw the bedroom. They'll say you were with a man."

"The people up here don't talk."

"Children always talk. And I'll be glad. And so will you." He took me in his arms defiantly.

I had said that I would be glad. I had meant it, in other moods.

I heard my voice say thinly, "I've got to stop you now."

"What do you mean?"

"I should have said it on the mountain. I've got to stop you now." And the words felt as weak as my hands felt, trying to push him away.

He laughed. He said, "You couldn't stop me if you tried. I've got you for ever."

"Let me go."

"I'm not letting you go. Nobody can take you away from me. The Council couldn't; the Guardian couldn't. It's you and me for ever."

"No, Julian, it isn't."

"Don't be a fool. Face it, darling, face it." He shook my arms gently.

"I have faced it," I said. "Alone."

He dropped his hands, but his look was still amused and disbelieving. "What's this, Valdes?"

"You heard what I said."

"You're crazy."

"I'm serious."

"If you are," he said, "you'll be sorry," and the smile went and I saw the dark heavy face of a man who would, in a few more minutes, be a stranger.

"Damned nonsense," he said, "Just because you're afraid of a gaggle of half-witted children."

"Quiet. I am not afraid of anything. I'm not afraid of you."

(The room was changing too, I thought; our place of safety with the timbered walls and the fire; I could still see its detail: a painted china plate, a scarlet rug, a little

carved wooden goat on the corner of the mantelpiece; but the room did not seem to be there.)

"I'm not in the least afraid of you," I repeated.

"Then you'd better be. There's a hell of a lot you don't know about me yet."

"You interest me strangely," I said, smiling at him.

He put his hands in his pockets and stood with an insolent assurance that was deliberate, therefore embarrassing.

"Now," I thought, "he looks common and silly."

"You think you call the tune, don't you, Valdes?"

"Naturally."

"And I'm the good little boy who keeps the law on Tropic Side. And comes to your bed when you beckon him. That's your picture of me, isn't it?"

"Go on," I said. "But try to speak more politely."

He grinned. "I call the tune on Tropic Side, don't forget."

"So you've said already today. I'm sure it's a great satisfaction to you."

"It is. Particularly when I play it the Council's way and get a snub for my pains."

"Meaning?"

"Remember the gambling? My formal request?" He was grinning so broadly now that his face had become a caricature.

"I remember," I said coldly. "What has that to do with anything?"

"Just one of the things you ought to know. I don't take orders from the Council. I've been running those games for the Westerners for more than a year."

"I congratulate you."

"And I'll go right on doing it. Really gives me more of a kick now your Advisers have disallowed it."

"I'm sure it does."

"Well, just one of the things you ought to know," he repeated. "Bear it in mind. I'm not your humble servant. I do as I like."

I found that my anger had gone beyond anger. My mind was somewhere above both our heads, detached and looking down.

"And after that squalid little boast," I said, "is there anything else?"

"Plenty. But what you've got to realise is that you can't take me and throw me around. I don't like being thrown around." He made his lips thin and he spoke through his teeth. "If you think that in your privileged position you can sleep with anybody until it looks difficult or dangerous, and then——"

"Quiet, please."

"I'll be quiet once I know you're clear on this. I don't want you to make any mistake about me."

"I'm sure it's profoundly important."

"Suppose you stop talking in this idiotic up-stage way. I know you and I know what you want."

Still the cold detachment kept me safe. "My poor Julian," I said.

"Your poor Julian, now?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You were right when you said that we had nothing in common."

The face was entirely the face of a stranger; the mouth twitched; no words came.

"If it amuses you to break the Law and brag about it, that's one aspect of you; not an impressive aspect, nor one that interests me much. I assure you that my ignorance of you is nothing to your ignorance of me."

"I know all about you," he said.

"Then you should know that I cannot be intimidated by boasts and threats and muscular poses. And you should," I said, "know that when you talk to me about the world, you make me sick."

I saw a blink of astonishment on the stranger's face.

"*Go West; get rich, as rich as Van Dorn or richer,*" I said to it. "What a pretty ambition; what a charming boyhood dream to have cherished all these years."

His bewilderment had quenched his temper. He said blankly, "What's wrong with it?"

"From somebody who's claimed—as you have—to understand the island, it's not only pathetic, it's despicable."

"Despicable?"

"Yes. I despise you for it. And I pity you."

He caught me by the arm. "That's enough. Don't go pulling the Guardian's wife act with me, do you hear? Because I know it's a fake. You're no more a grand lady than I'm a gentleman. You're a little girl from the South who was clever enough to make herself queen of Leron. But inside you're my sort and you always will be."

He had left my right hand free and I slapped his face. I slapped it so hard that his head shook. There came back, in the lightning, the thought of his hitting Teruel, the blow that looked as if all his anger were in his hand. Now I knew how that felt.

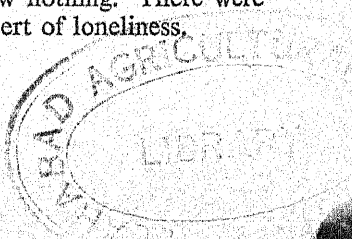
"I'll do it again," I thought, "if he says another word." I watched the red mark fading off his cheek. A lazy voice echoed in my ears, "We've both got brown eyes and bad tempers."

"That's finished it," he said at last. I inclined my head stiffly; it was more a bow than a nod. The silence strung out between us like the first silence, on the night that he came to my house.

XVII

IN doing us that violence, I foresaw nothing. There were many astonishments in the first desert of loneliness.

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There was the fact that the last scene between us vanished from memory in a few hours.

My fury looked like somebody else's mood. None of his crude words stayed with me. Threats and curses are, I suppose, unbelievable in the mouth of the person whom you love; and the long, horrible moments are not fully realised. While the anger blazes, you watch it from a little way off; not letting yourself think that this is he, because you know that there is another, the one who is tender, the one who laughs. And you don't believe wholly, or I didn't, that this could be the end. You have said that it is, you have torn at the roots, you have made it happen, but inside, you are convinced that it is not ended, that an impossible mercy will remake it.

And now all that I could remember, alone on the terrace, looking across the valley, were the true moments of love; all our happiness; all our laughter. I played them through again and again. They hurt and hurt, and nothing would make them hurt less. I forgot that I had ever been too proud to cry. The habit of crying became like an illness that took me unawares; the mornings were worse than the nights. And the next astonishment was to find that I could not bear the house. I thought, because I had been here alone for so long, that it would be proof against him, but it was not. After the week in which I saw nobody, the week when I pretended to be ill, I knew that I must leave the house. To go where? To take refuge in the North, in the house that had never seemed to be mine. There at last I should not fool myself that he would come to find me and that we should know those moments again.

I told Una that we were going back. She said, and this was the only direct reference that she ever made, "It will be worse there, you know."

She was right. For weeks, in that echoing emptiness, in the white temple among the trees, I could feel the last resources of strength leaving me. All the old devils came

back, with newly pointed weapons. "Here for ever; shut up and cold and caged for ever; but with an agony that was not there before," they said. "Is it for this that you threw love away?" In the mornings they were especially powerful. They could show me that the world was my destiny, as it was Julian's. They could take every truth that I had seen on the mountain-side and prove to me that it was a lie.

They woke me thus on the Day of Discovery. "Well, well," they said, "the day of ceremony and ritual that marks the island anniversary. What does it mean to you? Nothing. You would give Leron to the world now if this silence would break; if you could have him back again as he was.

"The only significance of today is that it makes the forty-third morning since he went from you. Seven weeks and a day have gone. And you only knew love for seven weeks. This means that he has been dead for a day longer than he was ever alive."

From that hour I was haunted by you both. All day I saw two faces. His face was clearer than yours; wherever I looked there was his brightly coloured image and there was your stone statue. Driving to the Cathedral, standing with the Council on the steps of the Senate; seated in the Forum, these two kept me company; the Guardian and the Claimant. I had never called him the Claimant in my thoughts before.

By evening I was tired enough to hesitate at the prospect of the dinner in Council. Since they had all become used, in these last weeks, to my pleading illness and staying away from public affairs, it would not be difficult. But if I stay here, I said, it will only be to think. And I fought to get myself back into the mood of my childhood when the Day of Discovery was a splendour that I longed to share; the excited child allowed to watch the fireworks over Main Harbour, bundled to bed as the trumpets sounded and the Guardian drove to the palace.

The first of the trumpets blew as I stepped into my carriage at the foot of Memorial Hill. The sound came up

and over the city, until the notes seemed as visible as the fireworks were; star-tracks of music in the sky. Down here there were the horses' hooves beating and the crowd-faces under the lights; overhead, the sweetly-piercing salute.

It had never failed me in ecstasy. And it did not fail now. Something in the lost, benumbed woman arose to answer it, some hint of courage. And I clung to that moment when I came to the stone palace and walked into the Council room. It would vanish, I knew. Even if I were as I used to be, I should know that it must vanish, that I must lay ecstasy aside with cloak and gloves.

Because, in the elegantly faded cabinet, with its chandeliers, its looped velvet curtains, its table laid for eight, I should find only my fellow Councillors; as people, familiar and ordinary; as the machine for the service of Leron, practical and efficient. We should eat our civilised supper together, drink our champagne, move into the ballroom for a formal hour or two and then depart.

Peter and I have agreed that the islanders have the real fun on this night. They dance in the streets; they let off the fireworks; they make the procession of boats; they climb the hills to light the beacons. For the Council, we have said, formality rules out fun.

So I came into the room, prepared for the little echo of courage to be killed quickly; and I found them all standing together. It was Peter's thunderous face that I saw first and I thought, "He knows. They all know." I came on to meet them.

Dalzano spoke before Peter. He said, "What have you heard?" but when he saw that I did not understand, he turned quickly to Peter and said, "Tell her."

"I still think," said Peter, "that Julian has gone mad."

"Why?" My voice was controlled and quiet. I managed to smile at them. "Why are you all looking so solemn? What has Julian done?"

Peter said brusquely, "In a note delivered to the Senate

half an hour ago, he declares himself Claimant and warns us that the Revolution is on."

XVIII

I HAVE come to the end of my part in the story. It gives you the reason for the thing that Julian has done, the reason that is already half-known to Peter and to the other Advisers. There has been too much talk for them not to guess what made it happen.

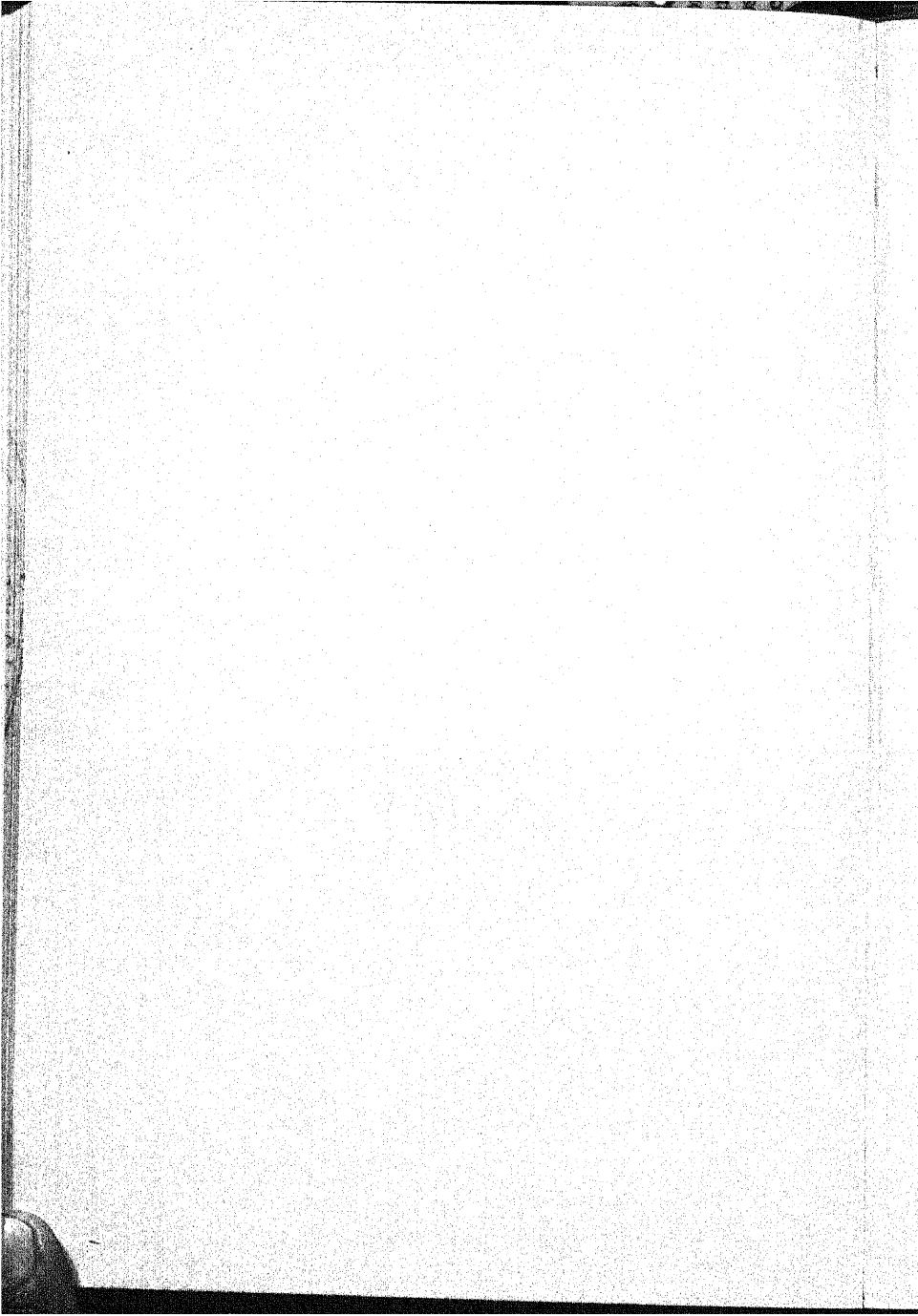
But if you ask me how it happened, I am as much in the dark as any one of us who stares at Leron's future tonight. I assume that he made his decision as soon as he left me and that the blue-print was, by his order, put into execution at once. We know now that the threat of contact with foreign agents was true. Not only does the propaganda show the world's mind at work on the acquisition of Leron, but it proves that the work must have been going on for a long time.

I do not know certainly that the stories about me are deliberately circulated from Tropic Side, but I must think that they are. They are proving more effective than all the other methods in dividing island opinion, in creating two distinct factions. There are those who still believe in me and those who want my death or exile. The feeling has not yet reached its peak of violence; it is rising still. You will see and hear.

You will see and hear. And you will judge. I cannot judge yet. I can judge myself but I am not competent to judge him. I still cannot realise fully that he is capable of this. Revenge is not an act that I understand when I see it at work. It has a theoretical shape in my mind, even now. I blink at the truth. I do not know how any man, under any provocation, could do what he has done.

And that must sound arrogant, after all that I myself have done. So I will bring you back to the words that I said at the beginning. It is Leron, and by Leron I also mean you, who must take me or break me now. You must use me as you will. We are involved together. I want what you want and what Leron wants. I can set upon myself only the island's value. All the other values are dead. All the other lives that I have lived are over.

THE WORLD OR THE ISLAND?



HOWARD was on his way home. As he drove by the sea-road from Nice, he remembered one more thing. It was Thursday night; a night when Harriette liked to go gambling after dinner. Perhaps she had gone alone; or perhaps she had gone with some of the crowd. Not being entirely sober, he decided upon the second possibility, because this would be nicer for Harriette. He would find her at the Casino, gay and winning money and in the middle of a group telling her that she was wonderful. He would tell her that she was wonderful. He would begin at once to make up to her for his recent behaviour. When they were alone, he would explain it.

Driving the Cadillac at top speed through the dark, he was explaining it to himself. For five days, he reflected, a battle had been fought out in his mind. When he tried to see who the adversaries were, they changed their shape. Sometimes they were Past and Present; sometimes they were Brooke and Harriette; sometimes they were two halves of Howard Rey.

He could be certain at least that the battle had begun with Brooke Alder's coming. He could trace all of it to Brooke. He could trace this evening's humiliation to Brooke; the small humiliation that made him squirm inside. Harriette could have prophesied it. Harriette could have told him exactly what would happen; but he had not confided in Harriette because he was still in his mood of separation from her. So he had trusted Tatiana. "And it was just one of her usual pieces of nonsense, that's all," said Howard to Howard, "They've been going on for years." Harriette would have seen through it; but he had let himself believe Tatiana when she said that she could sell him to Duncan Fitzgerald. Duncan, said Tatiana, was dissatisfied

with the designs for his summer palace; Duncan had thrown out the plans, sacked the architect, was ripe to welcome Howard Rey.

And none of it was true. On Duncan's yacht in Villefranche harbour he had met a mob, including the architect; he had learned that the summer palace was already under construction; he had drunk too many drinks and stood in a corner like somebody's umbrella while Tatiana told the bored millionaire all about his talents.

"I wouldn't have fallen for it," Howard thought, "if it hadn't been for Brooke's suggesting to me that I was a genius wasting my time. No," he corrected himself with gloomy justice, "Brooke never said that, nor anything like it, in words. He just said that I could do more. That's all he said. My trouble is that I've been inventing things he said ever since he stopped talking to me."

He forgot to squirm; he played through that frightening scene with Brooke in the river-room. It was growing flat, unreal. He still knew that it had happened, but by no word and no sign had Brooke recalled it. Brooke's manner since that moment had changed; he had retreated to the courteous friendliness of past years; bringing back Howard's earlier diagnosis: "Always glad to see me, but I'm not important to him."

"And the island—and calling me 'Peter'—and all that talk about Valdes, and signing an Order in Council? What was it? God knows." He had looked up Leron on the world atlas and failed to find it. Perhaps Brooke had taken the name from the Iles des Lérins off this coast; that was at least a clue. Howard had tried to convince himself that all the clues were to be found in some fantasy that Brooke was writing. It was possible, he supposed, that a man in an over-strained condition might let himself be obsessed by an imaginary world and talk under its influence as though it really existed. But he did not talk any more.

"And I don't want him to," Howard told himself as he

came through Antibes. "It's over; whatever it was. It drove a wedge between Harriette and me; and that's why I made a fool of myself. I'll always make a fool of myself without Harriette.

"Brooke'll be gone next week and I needn't think about any of it again. I don't give a damn what he's writing. That's for Merritt Lodge to fuss about, if he cares. I want Brooke to be all right, of course. But I let him get on top of me somehow. First I over-valued those first days of intimacy; then I thought he was crazy; then I got a *folie de grandeur* and here I am back where I started."

He had come to Cannes harbour; to the masthead lights and the starry water; to the Casino where he was going to find Harriette. He parked his car and went into the rooms. He was so certain of finding her here that he was desolated by not finding her. The heat of the rooms hit him and confused his head. He sought her like a dog without a master, pushing past the tables, dizzy with the lights and the hum of voices, seeing the faces of friends split into smiles and smiling mechanically back at them; saying "Seen Harriette?" butting his way through to the bar, fetching up at the same table where he had found her with Brooke last week.

The Baroness was sitting at the table, dressed in black velvet, drinking champagne with a long thin careful German whom she introduced as though she were conferring upon Howard an especial favour. That meant a drink; he did not want it; he drank it, looking over his shoulder all the time, while the Baroness and the long thin German went on and on and on about the Ruhr.

"But I promise you," the Baroness said, "that Harriette is not here. I should know if she were here; everybody says that she is not here, you have asked everybody and now you are asking me again if she is here."

Time to be going, Howard thought. It was midnight when he drove across the bridge and into the courtyard. He

saw that the lights in the river-room were still lit; he supposed that Brooke was working; he had no wish to talk to Brooke now. Urgent and stumbling, he came up the stairs and knocked at Harriette's door.

She was awake; she was sitting up in bed; she looked enchanting. Her neck and head emerged from a cloud of pink ostrich feathers. When he said "God, I'm so glad to see you," and she smiled at him, he thought that she must know how unhappy he was. She raised no objection when he hurled himself on to her cherished coverlet of *crêpe-de-chine*. There was a typescript lying there and he pushed it away. He rested his hot forehead on her arm; he felt her hand stroking his neck.

"I've certainly missed you," she was saying. "What's wrong? You're a little high, aren't you?"

"I guess I am."

"Where have you been?"

"On Duncan Fitzgerald's yacht. It was a damn-fool project of Tatiana's; it doesn't matter. Only I do love you and I forgot it was Thursday and I'm terribly sorry."

"Thursday? Now he's being sorry it's Thursday," said Harriette to the ceiling.

"Well, you'd have liked to go to the Casino, wouldn't you?"

"I did, darling. I took forty *mille* out of it before dinner. And since then," she said, "I've been having quite an interesting time. Quite—an—interesting—time. I only thank heaven my arteries haven't seen fit to harden just yet, or I'd be dead of a stroke by now."

He sat up, blinking at her. Her expression in the soft light from the bedside lamp was wryly amused.

"Somebody made you angry. Who was it? Brooke?"

She nodded. "Right first guess."

"Just tell me what he did, please."

"It isn't that sort, darling," she said, patting his head. "He didn't insult the servants or make a pass at me and I

don't want you to challenge him to a duel just because you're feeling affectionate. This is quite serious."

"How serious?"

She tilted her head to one side. "Not sure you're sober enough to hear about it."

"I'm perfectly sober."

"That's what is medically known as a contra-indication," said Harriette. "Anyway, get up. You're sitting on it."

"On what? Oh, sorry." He gave her the typescript. She put it in order, looked at him thoughtfully and said, "We'll have to talk quietly; he may come up to bed any minute. He's been at it again in the river-room ever since he came in. And I've read all of it."

"The thing that he's writing?"

"Yes. His alleged record. I want you to read it too. You're in it, by the way."

"I am?"

"Yes. And so is this house; and so are our friends." She was losing her calm rapidly; her voice shook now. "Tatiana, Liesel and Lucas. If you'll recollect, he met them here at dinner Monday night. What d'you suppose he calls them? 'Mad children.' Charming, isn't it?"

Howard blinked at her. "I don't get it. What is this thing? A diary?"

"It's the ravings of a lunatic."

"All about us?"

"Not all about us at all. I'm thankful to say," she murmured acidly, "that I'm not mentioned. It's about an imaginary island."

"An island called Leron?"

"How do you know that?"

"He told me."

"Told you about this——?"

"No, no. Said something about the island. He had a map of it."

Harriette said, "Well, perhaps it's capable of some

explanation. But I very much doubt it. I've never been so shocked in my life. My God, wait till you see what he's done to Ines. He calls her Valdes, but to anybody who knows, well, he's simply served her up on a plate. Whatever Ines' morals may have been—she was, well, the real thing after all. She might have behaved that way, but she'd never have talked about it that way. It's in the worst possible taste. But of course the whole thing's crazy. The money—the Mine. Hush, he's coming up now."

Howard turned his head; there were footsteps on the stairs; Brooke walking quietly; the footsteps passed the door, went on down the passage. The door of the guest-room was quietly opened, quietly shut.

"Crazy," Harriette repeated. "You can say what you like, Merritt Lodge can say what he likes, but I'm convinced that Brooke Alder's as mad as a hatter."

"You know, I thought that," Howard said. "After——" he hesitated; something warned him not to go on, not to tell what had happened last week. He found that he had said, "after what happened last week."

"What was that?"

"Maybe I oughtn't to tell you." And at once he was telling her. As he talked, he thought that he might be an actor proving himself word-perfect. Every phrase had stayed in his head and he heard his voice pouring on, while his eyes watched Harriette's listening face in the lamplight.

"And then I asked if he'd signed the notes he gave Millie Bolton; and he said 'Signed it? The Order in Council? You saw me sign it, Peter'. And I just said to stay there till Merritt Lodge came. And I left him."

Now his voice had stopped; Harriette was silent too. At last she said, "And you didn't tell me. Why didn't you?"

"I—well; Merritt Lodge arrived right afterwards. He was reassuring. He talked to Dickson. He said it was normal. And I——"

"And you," said Harriette mercilessly, "were having a

hate on me because I'd said Brooke had bad manners. Just another Yale jag. That's how it's been all this week."

"Oh hell, sort of—I'm sorry, darling."

"All right; only don't let's have it again. Because this is too serious. I can't understand Merritt Lodge. Did you tell him all that?"

"No. He didn't ask me any questions."

"H'm. D'you suppose Brooke acted like that in front of him?"

"I don't know."

"It's *very* serious, Howard."

She looked devoted, rapt, wide awake. He felt suddenly tired; his head ached and he wished that he had not talked. He said, "Look, darling, maybe we're making too much of it. If it's just a fantasy that he's writing, he might get so obsessed with it that he'd be all mixed up in his head for a few minutes. Mightn't he?"

She did not answer.

"Anyway, he must have explained it somehow when he gave it to you to read. What did he say?"

The face of the pretty lizard was laughing; laughing at him.

"Gave it to me? He didn't give it to me. I took it."

"You took it?"

"Certainly. Millie Bolton left the second part of it for him tonight; before he came in. I twitched one copy out of the parcel; there were three. And the first part was in an envelope on his desk; three copies. I just took one. What's the matter with you?"

"He doesn't know you've read it?"

"Darling, you're awfully slow in the uptake suddenly; is that the drinks? Of course he doesn't know I've read it."

Howard heard himself saying, "You shouldn't have done that. Lord! I wish you hadn't."

"And if you're going to burst into loud Yale sobs," she said, "I wish I hadn't told you. Don't be silly, darling. I was dying of curiosity. So was Merritt Lodge. Brooke's

still being cagey with him; I talked to him on the telephone to-day. Howard, stop it. Don't stand there looking like a great grieved clergyman."

"Never mind what I look like. I want you to promise me something now. Will you give Brooke back that script in the morning and tell him you've read it? Please?"

—"There being only one lady present," said Harriette sweetly, "I'll be goddamned if I will."

II

MERRITT LODGE wrote neatly and tirelessly. It was four o'clock on Saturday afternoon when he added the last paragraphs to his diary of Brooke Alder.

"To sum up, a most interesting excursion into fantasy, with one startling divergence from most fantasies.

"Certainly, B.A. has made for himself a place of escape. But its pattern remains his own pattern. He does not try to fool himself by the creation of a perfect world; an exquisite antithesis of the real world in which he lives and is tortured. Here's the paradox: that he takes into his reverie the things that hurt him. He endangers his own island."

Merritt blotted the page; turned back to read at random:

"B.A.'s European upbringing reflected everywhere. In the physical map of the island itself; in Leron's whole heritage of tradition; in reverence for hierarchies and for the status quo.

"Orrey on the control-tower a perfect and conscious parable of B.A. as he might become; the man losing his mind under the weight of responsibility. (An astute piece of self-knowledge.)

"Towers themselves, a distortion of what he saw in the oil-fields. Idea of the Lake (not the parable implicit in the Lake) must also derive from there."

"Ideal of moneyless community sharply indicative of his attitude towards his own wealth."

"Station X underlines B.A.'s nightmares about the future. Gerlach will produce a new weapon. Even though the fantasy seals off all atomic power with the magic of Leronite, there's always Gerlach."

Merritt paused here; the description of Gerlach was, he told himself, a coincidence: "The man with the noble head on the small body; the man with the mask of youth? Was it perhaps the reference to the faulty heart that made us bridle? A little over-sensitive, are we not? We are."

He smiled grimly and read his notes on Valdes:

"Interesting to see B.A.'s interpretation of a woman's thoughts. He shows sympathy and understanding. Query: Is this a story deriving from his own marriage? If so, a remarkable exercise in frankness. The reader would guess that the physical relationship had been unsatisfactory and that B.A.'s wife had told him so.

"B.A. has worked hard with Valdes; has almost succeeded in making her into an heroic figure. Then (with absolute fidelity to his pattern, debunking his own dream) has torn her down from the pedestal.

"The full confession, as put into her mouth, is from time to time brutal in the extreme. It destroys much of the reader's sympathy."

Here he reminded himself, for the satisfaction of his own curiosity, to ask Harriette Rey whether she knew anything of Brooke Alder's marriage. He turned the page:

"Roman Catholic influence on B.A. strongly apparent. Presume his French mother brought him up in the Church."

"He takes from here to there the fact of his loneliness. Main figures in story all solitary; no families nor home life, despite insistence on family tradition of Leron."

"Brotherly feeling between the Guardian and Peter is slender, romantic rather than real. Confusion of Peter with Howard is curious; also other strong hints in early chapter,

that the two worlds overlap and that the Guardian himself becomes confused between them. Do not see what B.A. is trying to prove here. Incidentally, these confusions are the only support for Mrs. R.'s story (at second-hand from Howard R.) of momentary hallucination."

Merritt Lodge shut the diary and put it in the drawer of his desk. He was puzzled; the story provided many side-lights on Brooke Alder; but it was only a story. Harriette Rey's hysterical analysis did not impress him. "Though I can't," he told himself reluctantly, "disregard Mrs. R. in all this. If it had not been for her, I might never have seen the manuscript."

"There is nothing odd about Alder's wish to keep it a secret. In his position, I certainly should. And judging from its effect on Mrs. R. he'd have done better to lock it up."

He let himself laugh again. "It's diverting to see her aroused to a peak of political consciousness by the suggestion that money is not to be respected. Those who do not respect it are worse than mad, they are Red. Despite her avowed cosmopolitanism, it's a typically provincial American reaction. And, dear me, the lady will be upon me in five minutes." He devoted the five minutes to preparing a line of strategy.

She came, he guessed, straight from the hands of the people who prepared her façade: her hair, her complexion and her finger-nails. The face of the pretty lizard was pointing at him hopefully; the lifting of the newly-plucked eyebrows asked the question.

"Well," he said, "that was all very interesting. I'm enormously obliged to you; here it is."

She looked as though he had invited her to touch something obscene. "What do you want me to do with it?"

"I thought you would like to return it to the owner."

"Certainly not." The snapping of the delicate jaws suggested that the lizard swallowed a fly.

Merritt said gently, "It's not your idea that I should return it to him?"

She shrugged her neat shoulders: "I don't care if it's returned or not. He hasn't asked for it. He never looks at it; those packets are still on his table. Besides, I should have thought you'd want it for your casebook."

"Even if I did, I'm hardly entitled to hold on to his private property without permission. Are you quite sure that he doesn't know I've got it?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because I seem to have offended him. As you know, I left a message at your house on Thursday night, asking him to call me. He didn't call yesterday and he hasn't called today."

"Doesn't surprise me a bit. He's been all over the place again in the car. I understand from Liesel that he took his typist for a drive."

"How did Liesel know that?"

"She saw them," Harriette said, "and she was at her most winsome and *gemütlich* about it. The cute little thing; she makes me sick. I'm meeting her in a minute. Look here, Dr. Lodge, are you completely discounting Howard's story now that you've read this—this thing?"

He stroked his chin: "What do you want me to say?"

"I can only tell you that Brooke Alder's presence in my house is becoming a nightmare to me."

Then she was silent, tapping her lacquered nails on the corner of the desk; then she said, "I can't understand your attitude, either. If I'd just read a disgusting, crazy thing like that, written by a man who's a patient of mine, a man in Brooke Alder's position——"

"If you please," Merritt said, "you must allow me my own opinions. I shall be dining in your neighbourhood tonight, and I was wondering if it would be convenient for me to call in after dinner——"

She was instantly soothed. When she had gone, he saw the script still lying on his desk.

"A little awkward," said Merritt to Merritt. "I cannot imagine that relations between Brooke Alder and myself will be improved by my handing it to him tonight with a laughing admission that Mrs. R. procured it for me." He was no longer at ease. The little stone man who sat inside was talking:

"Are we disappointed today? Are we perhaps convinced that the only secret lurking behind B.A.'s forehead was the secret of this manuscript?"

"Are we envisaging this time next week, when the distinguished gentleman, perfectly restored and in need of no neurologist's services, returns to Washington? Are we telling ourselves that nothing is going to happen after all?" He did not answer the little stone man; the nursery-rhyme couplet had taken a new turn, a turn of *vers libre*:

"One—two—three—four—five,
Once I caught a fish alive!
—and he slipped through my fingers."

III

HARRIETTE drank her cup of tea with the Baroness in the shortest possible time. The Baroness could talk of nothing but Brooke Alder; first, of his character, lineage, political status and prospects, as though she owned a racing-stable and he were the most promising thoroughbred. It was a sore temptation to tell her about the little Countess in Brooke's story.

"He should marry again. It is not right that such an attractive man should live the best years of his life alone, merely because one wife has given him a bad time."

"I believe," Harriette said, "that it was the other way. It was Brooke who gave Ines the bad time."

"Oh my darling, no, how can you say so, the reverse right up to the end, isn't it? To give her half a million, how is that to give her a bad time?"

"Brooke never measured up to Ines, in my view."

"Well," said the Baroness, "it is an unexpectedly charitable view. Ines was a little bitch and in all probability still is; characters do not alter, they only develop. You would like another cup of tea? No? It is of course a little demeaning, *infra dig*, perhaps, for him to take notice of the typist."

Harriette said, "You aren't suggesting that he wants to marry Millie Bolton?"

The Baroness pursed and rippled.

"Really, Liesel; what an old-fashioned creature you are. Naturally, he'd be kind to her; he's a kind person. And she's been working for him. Why shouldn't he take her in his car?"

"Your democracy, my darling," said the Baroness, "is to me like a sudden eruption that comes out on a pretty face. You have been eating something bad, I would say for this rash. What bad thing have you been reading to give you this sudden attack of democracy?"

"Don't try to irritate me, Liesel, there's a good girl. You know I believe in democracy and I always will."

The Baroness greeted this statement, as usual, with a controlled, operatic peal of laughter.

Harriette drove back into the hills on the edge of the evening, with the sun gone down and the night not yet come. The sky was still lighter than the land, but it was tracked with mournful, purplish clouds; there was more dark blue than green in the colours of hill and valley; where, in a little while, the lit windows would be gaily strung out upon the dusk, they were as yet mere pale blinks, forlorn and meaningless.

No, she did not like the feel of the evening at all, Harriette decided. If Merritt Lodge did not prolong his after-dinner visit, she would go down to the Casino. "If necessary, alone," she echoed Winston Churchill. "I'm getting so that I can't stand my own house or my own husband; fine thing. Mr. Brooke Alder's responsible for a lot more than a European crisis, if you ask me. No sooner does Howard snap out of his college spell than he turns into a Puritan preacher. If he says another word about my taking the typescript, I'll pack my trunk and go to Paris to-morrow."

As she drove across the bridge into the courtyard, she felt rather than saw the shadow cast by the house. The lights in the river-room were lit. She shivered in the sudden darkness and cold. She meant to go under the archway, on to the terrace and in by the other side; but the front door opened. She saw Brooke silhouetted, his arms stretched across the doorway, holding on to each lintel.

"There you are," he said softly.

"Hello, Brooke. Good evening."

"Wait, please."

"I was going around by the terrace."

"Wait, please."

"Why? What's the matter?" (I'm not afraid, she said to herself, not in the least afraid.)

"I'd like to have that copy of the record back."

"The record? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do, Harriette." His voice was gentle, reasonable; the voice of an adult reminding a child that there was no need to lie.

"I assure you I don't. I haven't taken it. What is it, anyway?"

He laughed. "You needn't be frightened, you know. For the moment there's nothing to be frightened of."

"I'm not frightened; why should I be?"

"No need," he said, "but you are."

That made her angry. "Brooke, I'll be obliged if you'll

kindly stop lecturing me from my own doorstep and let me walk into my own house."

"Do please come in," he said, with a kind of purr. He stood aside, then shut the door carefully behind her, placing his free hand on her shoulder; it was the gentlest touch; he smiled down at her.

"I know it isn't in your room," he said, "because I asked Jeanne to look."

"Much as I appreciate your giving orders to my servants," she snapped at him, "I tell you that I don't know what you're talking about."

"But why do you lie?" said Brooke. "There's no occasion to lie."

She said, "That is quite enough, Brooke. Where is Howard?"

"Howard didn't tell me you took it, if that's what worries you. Look, Harriette, I'm not angry. I knew that you'd try to get hold of it sooner or later. It's partly for your sake that I'd have preferred you not to read it. But that can't be helped now. Only you must give it me back. Each of those copies is destined for a purpose and I don't like them to leave this house."

"Please," she said, "I can't stand here arguing about nothing. I'm going up to my room." Brooke shrugged his shoulders and put his hands in his pockets. He stood watching her as she crossed the hall and began to mount the stairs.

"I imagine," he said, "that you gave it to Merritt Lodge. And that was not your business; nor was it a very intelligent thing to do." He did not move; when she looked back from the landing he still stood there; he said in a different tone, in the absent-minded tone that she had heard before, "At this moment, of all moments, we must decide our own destiny."

He raised his head. Looking down into the well of the hall she saw his face queerly lit by the hanging, wrought-iron lamp above this landing. There was no colour in the

face; a dark plume of hair lay on the forehead; the cleft between the brows looked like a black wound and the eyes were pale. The light made the cheek-bones high and the chin sharp. All bones, she thought, bones and shadows. It might have been a dead man's face looking up at her. He might be a dead man standing—hugely still.

She heard him sigh.

For a moment she felt that the walls of the house became thin, precarious. Tides of dark were sweeping in upon the house, engulfing it; all was changed here. It was a terror made by no recognisable agent; she could not find a name for it, nor a shape, nor a moment in time. She could not think, "This is going to happen," nor "This is happening", nor "This has happened". She was conscious only of a strong, steady pressure, coming against all that she knew, an impact that grew stronger; a quiet, remorseless invasion.

Slowly, Brooke turned and walked away.

In her room, Harriette rang the bell and it seemed a long time before Jeanne answered it. Waiting, she moved quickly; she turned up the lights, took off her hat and jacket, lit a cigarette, found that she was doing these usual things with a rapid and desperate devotion until she heard Jeanne's footsteps coming along the hall.

"Jeanne, please turn on my bath; and I'd like a drink up here; a Scotch and soda. Tell Serge to make it strong and not to put in too much ice; I think I may have caught a chill. Where is Mr. Rey?"

"I'll find him for you, Madame. I haven't seen him since tea-time, just when Mlle. Bolton arrived."

"Miss Bolton? Is she here?"

"Yes, Madame. She is doing some work with M'sieu Alder in the river-room. I understood that she would be staying for dinner."

"How very nice. From what did you understand that?" Jeanne said that she understood it from Mr. Rey.

"All I needed," Harriette said to herself. Now a new

series of rapid, devoted movements, splashing through the hot, scented bath, wrapping herself in the white towel robe, unwrapping herself, powdering her body, lashing the girdle of the white satin robe, sitting down at the dressing-table to deal with her face, swallowing half the drink. Howard knocked at the door. He wore the ravaged, ready-to-be-hurt look that came only when he was tired. He was seldom tired; the look touched her.

"Hello, darling," she said. "What goes on? Why must we have the pleasure of Miss Bolton's company tonight?"

"Brooke wanted her to do some work for him. Said he'd be keeping it up late; so I suggested she stayed."

"Well," said Harriette, wielding the scent-spray, "I don't imagine that it'll be the most amiable of *parties carrées*. Brooke has just been putting me through a third-degree about the typescript."

Howard looked at her wistfully. "What did you say?"

"Well, but naturally, I denied having taken it. What else could I do?"

"Is Lodge keeping it?"

"I've no idea. He's coming in after dinner; he may bring it with him. Little did I think," said Harriette, "that I'd ever welcome the thought of Merritt Lodge's coming in after dinner."

"You don't have to worry about the four of us dining together," said Howard uneasily, "Brooke doesn't want to eat before nine anyway; he and Millie are going to have something on a tray in the river-room."

IV

WHILE Millie Bolton waited for Brooke in the river-room, she thought that the noise of the typewriter was incongruous here. She kept looking over her shoulder; up at the smiling curves and arrowy wings of the gilded angel; at the tapestries

that made soft walls of departing colour, away down the long water-surface of the floor to the dais at the far end. It was a room in a museum, a ghost's room, a ballroom for dancers, not a room where you could sit calmly at a typewriter. Her eyes strayed again, to those curious chairs with clawed arms and feet; to the scarlet velvet settee, whose straight sides were caught by cords with tassels; to the smoky jade inlay on a black screen.

All the time she felt accompanied; that was the sound of the river perhaps; the river that seemed now to have voices in it. The river spoke to the room. To the enormous room, to the room that belonged to Brooke Alder. To the room in a dream.

It could not be a dream, any of it, because it had lasted too long. It had begun with a moment years ago in memory, five days ago in time, at a table in the Voile Bleue. After that she had lived the story of Valdes; hammering out those hundred pages alone in her little back-room; then there had been coming here with the finished work and the shock of not finding him. There had been a night of disturbed sleep, with island images standing around the pillow; waking to feel bereft and deserted. And then yesterday, when he came with the car and made the dream valid again. She had tried to hoard the moments of the drive, the words that he said; the curious atmosphere of these days, or years, made her feel that she invented them. But she could not make this great shadowy room vanish by blinking her eyes. She had tried; and it stayed.

There had come an end to past realities; an end to the Millie Bolton whom she had known. She knew now what Valdes meant when she spoke of shedding old selves like skins. The original Millie Bolton looked far and small; that person would have questioned; and this person knew that she must not question anything; because the questions held her back and all that she wanted was to be carried on, with him.

She heard the door open softly. He stood just inside it; not moving.

She said, "Do you want me? I've finished this. I just have to read it through."

"All right; read it through."

He seated himself at the piano. She heard the tune begin. (I must remember that tune; but it isn't an easy tune to remember; it's like the river; that's all I know.)

She read, under the white light from the daylight lamp.

"My speech to the Council was short. It seemed to me, I said to them, that when we had brought Julian to Trial, we should not have done enough. It would have been enough in the old days, because then the Claimant was a strong, recognisable force and Leron had had time to identify him. This stroke of Julian's was a lightning-stroke and the island still reeled under it.

"We could say, in an effort at smugness, that no Revolution in these days could hope to succeed except by such a method; that Julian's tactic admits that he must risk all at one throw; that any slower attempt at corruption must inevitably fail and crumble against our defences of tradition.

"But do we believe that when he is tried and exiled, we shall have solved today's problem? I do not believe it. When you ask me why I do not, I must say because he has linked his accusation of Leron closely with more private accusations. He has, in fact, brought two cases. The examining of one will not be enough to end the island's dilemma.

"But I do not propose that we shall dignify the other by examination in Court. My suggestion to you will rule out the necessity and rule it out honestly.

"I suggest that, instead of asking for the island's verdict upon Julian, we should ask for that verdict upon ourselves. That we should put the Regime on Trial; myself as Guardian, you as Council, with all that we have made here and tried

to make. So that Leron looks at Leron, tries it and judges it; judges whether we have succeeded or failed, and makes its final choice between the way of the island and the way of the world. That ends what I said in Council.

"I wanted to put it first because, while it deals with the fate of the island, it also illuminates the issue between myself and Valdes, an issue that might seem too subtle and difficult if you were not presented first with its conclusion, so that you might find your way back from there."

Still he played the tune; was it sadder now than it had seemed, or was the sadness in the words as she read them?

"It was not easy to hear Valdes out; to know it all. I think that we were both of us more dead than alive when she had finished the story.

"No matter what state of confidence exists between two people (even in the most happy-go-lucky relationship; a relationship that need never be tested), the private thoughts of one could, if revealed, shake and astound the other. We are, each of us, alone in our inmost selves, possessors of a room full of secrets that we have not even learned to call secrets, so certain are we that they cannot be shared.

"In part, of course, the certainty is a delusion. Our overtones, overtones from the references in private thought to the contents of those rooms, may become audible. Those who are close to us may hear them. But we depend for our privacy upon their keeping silence. Once the door's opened with words, the mischief is done.

"The overtones were sounded involuntarily, heard and left unremarked in goodwill. That could have gone on for ever, a conversation without a language. The words that pick the lock, or (as in the case of Valdes) the words that hand over the key, unmake the past. But they design no future. That's for the two who are now stripped, robbed and undefended, to make.

"For a while, after she had finished telling me, I could

only stare at her. I found the sight of her heart-breakingly familiar; an insistence upon time past. I could only remember.

"I thought, 'You have been the other half of me for so long that I do not feel betrayed, but disabled; as though I'd lost a limb. And though I may protest that I could not live like that, I am living like that; remembering the time when I was whole.

"But I cannot look back for comfort. Because now, in all our life together, I see tonight foreshadowed. I see us moving towards this. No memory is safe. I can look at every small happiness that I thought we had, and mistrust it, wonder how much of it was my own invention.

"This is the hardest thing to forgive, a theft that cannot be repaired. You have taken the past and changed it, so that I can never have it any more. If you had died, you would at least have left it with me.'

"I felt the drowning clutch of weakness begin. It would be easy to sink. Here was the temptation of self-pity; the dangerous, seldom useful, knowledge that right was on my side. It pointed inexorably the way of retreat; retreat to the ego, that is as naïve as a child, crying 'I'm hurt' as though this were the only fact in the universe.

"I could retreat to that. And retreating, I should take weapons with me; hurt pride, outraged sensibility, hate and jealousy and anger; they are the weapons that strike upon oneself, that grow to be heavy in the hand.

"In our room where the night was ending and the half-tones hung, I stood at odds. Valdes did not speak now and the persuasion of grief grew stronger.

"It had happened before. All this had been thought before; men had walked by the same narrow, twisting paths that I took now; walked alone in their brains, with a devil plaguing them. 'However strong you were when you began,' the devil said, 'you are not strong enough to bear this. You should not be asked to bear it. Give up; retreat.

She has smashed you utterly. There is nothing left for you but to lick your wounds. Forget her and hate her. Forget Leron.'

"And when he got to there, he came up to my last defence. He struck on it with all his strength. It held.

"I saw that she was right; that we had each, by a different way, come to the meeting-place. The thing that mattered tonight was not myself nor Valdes, but the island."

Slowly, Millie Bolton laid the typed sheets together. She glanced over her shoulder towards the piano, where the thread of music had snapped and Brooke Alder sat still. She said softly, to the dreaming face:

"Are you ready for me, now?"

"Not quite, no. I'm half-way there. Comes of talking to Harriette Rey," he said. He played another chord, dissonant and jarring; he sighed. "I'll be glad when the gap closes altogether; I find it tiring to be in two places at once."

She laid the typed sheets with the others on the table. He called to her, "What have you done with those copies?"

"They are here," she said.

"Still one missing," said Brooke, "I was right. She gave it to the man in the mask. Would you make a note: that when we have completed the record, I want one copy sent to my wife; whose present name and address you have. One copy sealed and left here for Howard Rey. And the third—but there is no third, is there? We must get it back." He rose from the piano-stool. He smiled at her suddenly.

"How did you get here?" he asked. The look of strain had left him. He whistled a phrase of the tune, waiting for her answer, looking up towards the carved angel. "Pretty, that. It's odd to be in this house; in Valdes' house. It feels better than I thought it would. But you——?"

"I came to help you finish the record," said Millie.

"Yes, so you did. Could you take some dictation now? Or

are you tired? You look tired; they've been tiring days."

"I'm not at all tired."

"Good." He was standing before the inlaid screen; the furrow between his eyebrows deepened; he was silent for a long time; she watched the thoughtful head; the wings of the screen made a sort of shrine for it; he looked like a statue in a niche. When he spoke, his voice was quiet. She moved her chair around from the refectory table and faced him.

"When I say that the flaw comes from within, that Leron was brought to this day, not by an enemy outside, but by a weakness of its own, I accuse myself rather than Valdes. My failure with her isn't just the failure of a husband to know his wife. One phrase of hers remains to charge me: 'The imprint of your personality, that you have laid on me as you have laid it on Leron.'"

He snapped his fingers.

"That isn't the Guardian's job. The Guardian's job is to interpret the island's wishes and to carry them out. To lead, but not to drive. You mustn't rely on your own personality, your own dynamo, to keep any group together. Because, if it's only your strength that binds them, they'll scatter and be lost as soon as you go. All wrong for me to make my own version of Leron, just as it was all wrong to try to make my own version of Valdes.

"I've been saying this to myself in the quick limbo of these last days, the days that have run between the taking of Julian and the eve of the Trial, on which we now stand."

He paused, rubbing the palm of his hand upwards across his forehead; it was a gesture that Millie had begun to know; perhaps it was an unconscious effort to smooth out the furrow between the brows.

"In these days, I have tried to see as much of the island as I could; travelling alone; leaving to the Council the preparations for tomorrow. Valdes wanted to be busy with these preparations; I understand that perfectly. But I thought

that my job was to go alone; to look and to listen; time being very short."

He was silent again; he moved away from the screen.

"We're almost at the end," he said. "Almost at Now. But I think, for the record, I'd like to have the burning at Tropic Side. That was last night; I saw it. I want to put it down for two reasons: One, because it was Julian's prophesied clash between the New Guard boys and that waterfront gang that Teruel used to lead. Two, because I don't suppose that anybody will ever see Tropic Side like that again." He dropped on to the scarlet settee, leaning his head back. "Even for the record," he said, "I'll put down no detail of the attacks on Valdes, neither what I heard nor what I saw written. This is of Tropic Side. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"I went down there last night. Into paradox. Through those stage-sets of streets, with the cafés still open, the flutes playing and the Leronese natives posturing as they do for the foreign visitors. (And after all, when you come to think of it, the soldiers of the Legion are no less foreign to them than the pleasure-seekers from the West.) The men themselves stalked grimly by, not noticing.

"The square and the palace are still floodlit, by order of the Legion Commander. It's a safeguard against looting and brawling. I stood on the waterfront; hearing the sound of the Leronese flute, sniffing the scent of the one flower and—for a moment—recapturing what used to be. Then I looked towards the glass palace. I knew that if I went in, to Julian's long rainbow-coloured room, I should find it sprouting officers and orders. On the flower-banked terrace outside I could see two sentries. They marched, met, exchanged salutes, wheeled about. They made me laugh. They looked so pompously, heavily out of place.

"At first glance, you'd have said that the harbour was as gaily lit as ever, but the lights were the lights of Coast Patrol. All foreign ships are withdrawn beyond the three-

mile limit. I looked into the dark and thought of them. According to our intelligence, there are warships as well; gathered to see the last of Leron.

"But they won't see that. Nobody will.

"I passed the gambling-rooms as I walked west. They were deserted now, except for the soldiers posted here; they were new to my eyes; a line of brightly-painted façades, Julian's lure for the islander. Then I came to the shops and booths, still placarded, still urging people to buy. Nobody here to read the placards, except the soldiers and a few natives.

"Then I was at the place where the waterfront slopes down. Here Tropic Side as it is for the foreigners, the luxurious Tropic Side, ends and the old native town begins. There isn't much of it, of course; only a last huddle of coloured houses before you come to the green land above the reef; where the beehive huts cluster beneath the palms and the painted canoes lie up.

"I meant to walk beyond the town to the reef. But I didn't get so far. The market stands just inland, between the new town and the old. It's a smaller version of the Central Distribution Market in the Capital. As a rule it's lighted and busy until midnight. The foreigners like to see it, like to see people helping themselves to what they need without paying. They're always more impressed by that than by the reverse process; by the fact that people give what they grow or what they make and don't receive payment.

"I didn't have time to think that I'd been here with Julian often, that I was giving my thoughts a chance to bite on him. Because what I saw as I came up off the waterfront wasn't the market but a pyramid of flame. With a shadowy crowd ranged all about it and the Legion fighting the fire. Black silhouettes of soldiers, thin crosses of lit water from the hoses; smoke and toppling walls and the natives running back.

"A squad came past me, marching prisoners away. They were young boys, students, supporters of the New Guard. Some of them were still shouting, but weakly and automatically, as though they were machines left to run down. I heard Valdes' name and my own name, and one of them was shouting, "Kill the Claimant!" The others, Teruel's gang, came after in a ragged line. These were bound, because they carried knives. I saw bleeding heads in both ranks and the shouts came from Teruel's side also. No need to recall the words.

"Then, a long time afterwards, when I had talked to the Captain and heard the story, I stood alone among the smoking ruins of the market. It was the New Guard who had done this, my own supporters, and it hurt.

"I walked through the wet, blackened shells of the arcades. I saw the charred remains of meat and vegetables; tatters of silk; splintered fragments of furniture. There were some odd survivors: a whole barrel of oranges, a small bright carpet; a native picture of Tropic Side, crudely painted, lying in the wet ashes.

"It was a poor picture and I was sorry for it. Is it possible to detest a thing, however ugly? You could, I suppose, despise the mind that made it; but the thing itself, because it is made, because it is there, because it has no will of its own, cannot be hateful. Rather, it arouses compassion."

Brooke Alder ceased in his story and looked at her; he wore his wide smile: "Does that sound foolish to you? I often find myself feeling for inanimate things. Perhaps it's because on Leron we set such store by making."

"I understand it. It doesn't sound foolish at all."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure."

"There's a temptation to record one's own thoughts, you know, because they were to oneself an integral part of the scene. But they ought to be shareable."

"They are."

He said, "I don't think you need take any more down."

She heard herself asking, "What did you do after that?" and thought that her voice had the placating hush common to voices speaking to invalids or children.

"I stayed there till dawn; till this morning, that is. I watched the dawn come on Tropic Side," said Brooke. "Did you ever watch it there?"

She shook her head.

"It is dramatic. First the break upon the dark, over the sea, looking south-east; and the stars dying. Then the horizon colouring with sunrise; the sea turning white. Then that battle in the sky, the battle between East and West. The moon fading, the night going, the daylight winning all along the line. On shore, there's a moment of somersault, when the lights are whisked away and the land becomes dark with the sky pale above it, where a moment before there was a lit land and a dark sky."

He was silent again. "And tomorrow, dawn over the Forum." He passed his hand upward across his forehead. "What have I been doing all day? Oh, yes, they drove me back to this house, to Valdes' house, to get some sleep. And this afternoon I went over to Station X." He rose from the settee and strayed towards the piano.

"What do you imagine is going to happen there?" he called to her.

"I don't know."

"Well, I do," said Brooke Alder. "I'd no doubt in my mind—even before I went there—that Gerlach had completed that experiment of his."

"I thought you said that all experiments were suspended until after the Trial?"

"I know I did. They are. But I didn't trust Gerlach. And I still don't. If he wants to hand that discovery of his to the foreigners, now's his chance. And what Valdes didn't see, what was obvious to me at once, was that the

ray has no use, except as a weapon. That's why I went to Station X; to discuss it with him."

"You saw him?"

"I had to look——" he snapped his fingers. "As Tribe said, he's working with Leronite. What does that mean? It means that where we've so jubilantly called the formula discovered in Leronite 'the last mathematic', we're wrong. Gerlach has been reducing the formula still further. This is Leronite defeating Leronite. The Lake no longer meaning safety, but, by one further refinement, producing danger. We boasted that Leronite had turned off war. Now it can turn it on. *This* is the last mathematic; a force that, unleashed, can send the whole world and the island up into nothingness."

He did not speak as though he were afraid. He sounded dominant and convinced, but not afraid. His voice, she thought, was like the voice of the statesmen whom she had heard in war; she remembered their calm eloquence and how often she had contrasted it with the chattering, irresponsible, pathetic voices of the small people in buses and Tubes and air-raid shelters. As though, she had thought then, the leaders were different animals, with stiffer spinal columns and nerve-ends protected by steel skin; as though they had no stomachs to turn over when the bombs came near; no families to be afraid for, no black doubts inside their heads.

"May I ask you a question?" she said timidly.

"Of course."

"Why should Gerlach want to end the world and the island?"

"He has a long grudge. We've policed our scientists since the beginning. That was in the Charter."

"Could he get the formula out of Station X? It's guarded by the garrison."

"True. But if the verdict goes against us at the Trial, then the world moves in. The world will have the destructive weapon in its hands again; the final destructive weapon."

"I don't understand," she said, "how—even if you *can* imagine the Regime losing—you can worry about what happens after that."

Brooke laughed softly. Then he stared into the distance; playing a scale of treble notes with one hand.

"That formula should be destroyed," he said. "Now."

"Won't it still be in Gerlach's head?"

He looked at her quickly: "Are you suggesting that the solution is to destroy Gerlach?"

She thought about it. He was not waiting for her answer. "Valdes could have stopped this," he was saying. "She could have ordered Tribe to forbid any further research. She sees that now, of course. If only she'd seen it then."

"But listen; surely the answer is that if that thing is there to be discovered, it will be. Sooner or later. Doesn't it go in with your theory about poetry and music? I may have got it wrong; but, as I saw it, you said that everything—once made—was within the range of human concept."

He was looking at her with an air of immense concentration. "I did say that, yes; I do believe it."

"Then even if you destroyed Gerlach and the formula, somebody else would, in time, find the same weapon."

He smiled at her. "Then nothing is safe, ever?"

"I suppose not."

He said, "And so we come back to the source; to the flaw that is within."

She watched him.* He did not play the tune. He struck a chord and then shut the piano. He said, "God, I've got a headache. It's mixing me up again. Where are we?"

"We're safe. Till tomorrow. Look, don't try and think about anything more. Sit down and smoke a cigarette. Would you like some food? It's nearly nine o'clock."

"I'd rather sleep, I think."

He stretched himself on the scarlet settee, stacking cushions behind his head. "You ought to eat something," he said. "Tell Una; no, not Una." He snapped his fingers.

"Don't worry about me. I'll get something to eat and I'll come back." His face frightened her; it had thinned so quickly in these last days; the skin was stretched across the bones; the eyes looked paler.

He smiled suddenly. "Thank you. I'm all right. I just want to sleep."

"You shall. Nobody will come in here, I promise."

"Bless you. Could you turn off the light on the table? It strikes across my eyes."

She turned it off.

V

MERRITT LODGE got to the house at half-past nine. In the living-room the radio was playing softly. Harriette and Howard Rey were seated on each side of the Canasta table. No sign of Brooke Alder. Harriette, he was amused to discover, greeted him as though he were a sail and she had been on a raft for three weeks. Howard stood gloomily at her back while she told Merritt for the third time how thankful she was that he was here.

"What I've been through with him about taking the type-script off his table. You've no idea. Did you bring it back?"

"No," said Merritt, smiling at her; she was, he thought, at her most decorative and most foolish. "Did you expect me to?"

"He accused me of having given it to you."

Merritt raised his eyebrows: "And you said?"

"I said I had no idea where it was and that I had not taken it. What else could I say?"

"You could have said you had taken it and that you did know where it was," said Howard heavily. She was more like a snake than a lizard when she snapped at Howard.

Merritt said, in the smoothest voice that he could achieve, "Well, well, we mustn't take all this too seriously. I can probably put it right with him. Where is he?"

"In the river-room. Asleep," said Harriette. "I just sent Miss Bolton in to wake him and tell him that you're here. Do have a drink, won't you?"

"No, thank you; really." He seated himself beside her on the brown sofa with the yellow piping. She had taken up a piece of gros-point embroidery and she began to work upon it. The light from the parchment-shaded lamp gave her red finger-nails a dazzling polish. They were greedy hands, Merritt thought.

Howard stood before the fireplace, paying no attention to them.

"I don't know," said Harriette in a brittle voice, "if you'll approve of your patient working till nine o'clock and then going to sleep without having dinner."

"I don't know that I shall," Merritt assured her. "Has he been writing some more of the—ah—story?"

"I imagine that he has." The voice was now an icy thread. "But you'd better ask the typist."

"Is that the little lady from American Travel?"

"It is."

"And she has no objection to working till nine o'clock and going without her dinner?"

"Miss Bolton had her dinner half an hour ago. I have no idea, and my lack of interest in the matter borders on the supernatural, whether she has any objection to working late hours or not."

The door opened and he turned to study Miss Bolton; just the drab little woman whom he remembered from last Saturday; but she looked as though she could do with a rest. There were dark circles under her eyes; her skin was shiny and pale. She shut the door and stood just inside it.

Harriette said, in the voice of a mother instructing a shy or ill-mannered child, "Come in, Millie. This is Dr.

Lodge. I believe you did meet here for a minute, last week?"

"Yes, we did. I'm so sorry; Mr. Alder is still asleep."

"I asked you to wake him," said the brittle voice from the sofa. Merritt did not turn his head to look at Harriette because he was suddenly interested in Millie Bolton. She had a certain dignity and assurance. She smiled as she said gently, "I know you did, Mrs. Rey, but I thought it better not to. He was so very tired when—"

"Dr. Lodge is here to see him professionally," Harriette snapped.

"That's all right," said Merritt easily. "Nobody need worry about that for the moment. He was working late, was he?"

"Yes." Assurance and dignity, but no friendliness; the eyes, and they were pretty eyes, looked at him as though they judged him.

"And what was he working on? Or is it a confidential matter?" He wished that she were just a little smaller; the eyes were level with his.

"He was dictating something to me," said Millie Bolton coolly.

Merritt arched his eyebrows: "Something? Confidential, then? I must ask no more questions?"

He saw that she flushed a little as she said, "I shouldn't have thought that you needed to, Dr. Lodge."

"What precisely——" the brittle voice had no longer the quality of a thread but of something with a sharp point—"do you mean by that, Millie?"

"I understood from Mr. Alder that you and Dr. Lodge had read his work, Mrs. Rey."

Merritt was conscious of a sudden beatific grin on Howard Rey's face. This annoyed him more than Miss Bolton's tranquil accusation annoyed him. And it was not good for him to be annoyed; it made his heart beat too quickly. He coughed.

"I suggest," said Harriette's voice, "that instead of wasting

Dr. Lodge's time any further, you take him to the river-room now."

"Oh no, Mrs. Rey, I can't do that. I promised Mr. Alder that nobody should go in."

"My dear young lady," said Merritt, "it's obvious that you understand the meaning of orders. So I'm going to take you into my confidence and tell you that I'm under orders to pay Brooke Alder a visit every now and again while he's here. There now; does that make it all right?"

She said nothing; she looked at him doubtfully. He found himself wondering what this queer little creature made of Brooke's island.

"I'm in no hurry," he said to her; "I'm perfectly happy to let him sleep a little longer."

The door opened behind them. Brooke saw Harriette's look and Howard's look. Millie Bolton's look was different, ("as though she would be called upon in a moment to fight for her young.")

"Hello, Mr. Alder," Merritt said, "how are you?"

He was disturbed by Brooke's appearance; by the sudden, inexplicable thinning of the face, that left the bone-structure sharp and made the eyes hollow. It was a dramatic change. The huge feeling of power came in with him. Merritt watched the body's easy, quiet movements, the loping walk into the middle of the room.

"Good evening," said Brooke. "Did you want to see me?" He ignored the Reys; he ignored Millie Bolton. He was impatient but not unfriendly; he said, "So little time. Come up to my room. Excuse us, won't you?"

He went ahead of Merritt into the green guest-room. The bedside lamp was lit, the bed turned down. Serge had put out his pyjamas, dressing-gown and slippers. Brooke glanced at these as though they amused him. "Something that I shall not be needing tonight," he murmured.

"Not intending to go to bed?"

"I've slept a lot today." He began to take off his jacket

submissively, as though expecting a physical examination; then suddenly threw it aside and squared his shoulders. He smiled down at Merritt.

"Now, little man——"

It was the least fortunate epithet that he could have chosen. Merritt did not trust himself to speak.

"You are going to give me back that copy of the record. Got it with you?"

"Really," Merritt said, "I see no point in protracting a lie. Mrs. Rey—in her over-zealous anxiety——"

"Quiet, please. Very gallant of you to defend her. But she would have taken it in any case, I assure you. And I'm not in the least angry with her."

"Only with me, I assume," said Merritt stiffly.

Brooke laughed. "I haven't the time. Got it with you?" he repeated.

"No; it's in my desk at home."

"Pity," said Brooke. "Never mind. We'll find a way round. Did you read it?"

"I did."

The smile was disconcerting; the eyes, Merritt thought, were paler; some of the blue had left each iris. The smile remained; Brooke seemed to be waiting for his comments.

"There would be remarkably little point in my pretending that I hadn't read it," he said. Brooke continued to smile.

"And I apologise for yielding to the temptation."

Still the smile.

"May I say that I was greatly interested in this island of yours?"

"You may."

"I imagine that the story has been building in your mind for years." He felt as though he were walking uphill in tight shoes with the wind against his face. His breath was short. Brooke said, "You're here on a professional visit, as I recall."

"Part of my interest in your island is professional."

There was no trace now of the watchful look; there was an infuriating air of patience with unimportant chatter.

"Oh; how could that be?"

"In the fact," Merritt said, "that you never wrote it until now. When, for the first time in many years, you have been relieved of responsibility for a little while."

"And that has medical significance?"

"Let us say that once certain strains are removed, you find yourself able to write the story instead of dreaming it."

Brooke's voice was colder: "You assume that I have been dreaming it?"

"Am I wrong?"

Brooke did not answer. He smiled again and said, "I don't want to talk to you about the island; is that clear?" He seated himself on the side of the bed and lit a cigarette. He looked mocking and sure. "You see," he said, "yours is the type of research that is bound to lead to trouble."

"Why must it lead to trouble if you and I talk about the island?"

"It won't. Because we aren't going to."

Merritt changed his tactics. "Do you know what my conclusion was when I had finished reading? Not that you care, but I shall, nevertheless, tell you. It wasn't a conclusion about the island, but about you."

"Yes?" said Brooke patiently.

"That you are probably the most honest man in the world."

He studied the effect of the compliment; there seemed to be no effect. Brooke said "Oh?" and then, musingly—"What is the difficulty in being honest? If I *am* honest, it is because I find it easier than its alternative. I have often thought that the naturally truthful are those intelligent persons who have found out early what enormous complications are involved by lying."

"That, from you, is highly cynical. In fact, there's nothing easy about being honest. Most people," Merritt said, more

comfortable now, the top of his head being several inches higher than Brooke's, "most people find it easier to fool themselves."

"I admit," said Brooke, "that the world has been doing that for years. But it's an acquired habit; not a natural one. Curious to think that an acquired habit has brought civilisation to the point where it's about to commit suicide."

"You'd say that the current troubles come from persistently fooling ourselves?"

"I would."

"How?"

"Fooling ourselves," Brooke said, "that it's the other fellow's fault; Hitler or Stalin or whoever happens to have qualified as the scapegoat. It never was the other fellow's fault, you know. It was ours; man's. We are as responsible as they." He rubbed the palm of his hand upward across his forehead and said, "The flaw within."

"I noticed your insistence upon that. What would you call the flaw?"

"Just evil," said Brooke lightly.

"Evil where? Evil what?"

"Evil. 'The powers of darkness within us.' I quote."

"Meaning that all men are evil?"

"Meaning that all men have that potentiality within them. Once we began to ignore that simple fact, we were lost."

"And who would you say was to blame?"

"Everybody. From the philosopher to the advertiser. From the psychiatrist to the soap-manufacturer. From the delicate agnostic to the high-powered salesman."

"I don't see," Merritt murmured, "why you link the two species."

Brooke said, with infinite patience sounding in his voice; as though he had had to explain this many times to people of slow wits and were entirely ready to explain it again: "Because, don't you see, what they've been working at, each in his separate star, is to block up man's natural channels

of discontent. To sell him happiness. To teach him that this happiness lies within his grasp; that his goals are mental balance, a healthy body and a stable income. The incidental prizes, of course, are homes, cars, washing-machines, and all the rest of the achievements in kind."

"Reputable goals, surely, and useful prizes?"

Brooke sighed. "Oh, certainly; for the kindergarten of the Twentieth Century. But we shouldn't have let ourselves become so childish or so gullible as to accept the universal message."

"And what is that?"

"What is the universal message? Roughly, you've got to be happy, damn it. More specifically, How can you not be happy? You're a decent fellow in a world of decent fellows. There are, of course, a few unfortunate cases of maladjustment, e.g. Hitler or Stalin, but there are enough decent fellows, thank heaven, to fight them on their terms. And the survivors, because the decent fellows always win, must set about the millennium again."

He snapped his fingers.

"The millennium here in the world; that's the target, isn't it? Income can be distributed equally—the East holds—and once that's really straightened out, nobody will be naughty or sad any more. Income—the West says—can be earned; up to any figure you like; and the more you earn, the greater your opportunities for kindness, goodness and happiness will become. The Communion of Millionaires here on Earth."

Merritt Lodge had forgotten the argument. He had heard Brooke use the language of the island, the division of the world into East and West. It was no slip of the tongue; it had been said naturally, without hesitation.

He stood staring at the celebrated head. Here was a clue to the secret behind that frontal bone. ("But we mustn't go too quickly, must we?" said the little stone man. "He's been writing his stuff all evening, remember. He's still deep in it.

We are too cautious, are we not, to rush headlong, like poor Mrs. R., to a conclusion which might, if it were correct, have international consequences?"

He heard Brooke sigh.

"But it's all very simple. I don't know why you need me to expound it."

"If material happiness is a fallacy—and I don't entirely agree——"

—"Oh, no," Brooke said, turning to gaze at him meditatively. "I forgot, you as a scientist, wouldn't agree."

("Scientist? Careful now. Are we letting the portrait of Gerlach influence us in any way? It would, would it not, be within reason, to say 'scientist' when talking to a Doctor. But even so . . .")

"I am always interested when people of your mental calibre talk about God, Mr. Alder."

Brooke threw back his head and laughed: "Talk about God? I was specifically talking about no God."

"Which implies God," said Merritt.

"And that," said Brooke dreamily, "offends you. It would. Never mind. You and I talked enough this afternoon to prove the differences between us."

"I beg your pardon? This afternoon?"

"At Station X."

("One—two—three—four—five,
Once I caught a fish alive !

And the thing to remember now," said the little stone man, "is that as long as we don't startle him or challenge him, he'll continue in this vein. We must let him talk ; we can always amuse ourselves, can we not, by writing headlines? 'PRESIDENT'S EUROPEAN ADVISER SUFFERS BREAKDOWN BROOKE ALDER RESIGNS ON MEDICAL GROUNDS.' And we can write our own name there, can we not? Quietly, discreetly; the man behind the scenes; the public's mystery

figure in all this; Merritt Lodge, who discovered the truth about Brooke Alder.”)

He did not know how long the silence had lasted. Brooke was still sitting, chin in hand, staring at the opposite wall.

Merritt said, “What would you say was our fundamental difference in argument?”

Brooke rose lazily. “I thought I’d made it clear. But if you’re asking for the fundamental difference between *us*, I’d say it was that outsize chip that you carry on your shoulder.” He patted the shoulder. “I don’t altogether blame you, but it must be heavy luggage.”

Merritt was astonished by his own hot anger; even at this moment, it could spiral up into his throat and choke him. (“Gerlach or Lodge?” asked the little stone man, “Gerlach the island scientist or Lodge, old-fashioned Boston’s notorious seducer? Which would we rather be in this disordered mind? We can make our choice, can we not, without losing our temper?”)

He found that he was panting.

“And people with chips on shoulders, people with grudges,” said Brooke, “are apt to be dangerous.” He loped towards the door.

Merritt made his voice as calm as his breath would allow. “What do you mean by dangerous?”

“I mean,” said Brooke, “that you can’t be allowed to endanger the island. I’m Guardian, remember. I know exactly what you mean to do, and I’m not giving you the chance to do it. You’ll stay here under lock and key, till the Trial’s over.”

He leaned his back against the door: “Nothing you can do about it, is there? Without getting hurt.”

Merritt stood still, in the detachment brought by danger. He measured the size and strength of Brooke, lounging against the door. He saw that the key was on this side; Brooke had not yet touched the key. He noted the symptoms in his own body, that came from the quick

secretion of adrenalin, plus the pain of the heartbeat. He realised that argument was useless. The face whose eyes seemed to grow more pale as he watched was no longer the face of a sane man.

He smiled at Brooke; he moved slowly nearer; he fixed his eyes on Brooke's eyes and began to say, "I think you misjudge me," as he made his quick grab at the key in the lock. There was a taunting second when it was all right; when it was going to succeed; Brooke's eyes did not leave his; he did not move from his lounging pose. His hand shot down, with a weight of iron, on Merritt's wrist, as though the hand were not a part of Brooke at all.

("One—two—three—four—five,
Once I caught a fish alive!

Here was the second couplet at last:

*"Why did you let him go?
Because he bit my finger so."*)

"Silly little man," said Brooke.

The weight and pressure of the fingers around his wrist hurt him; he told himself not to fight and found that he was fighting; as he struck and struggled, he was panting the word "idiot"; and meaning it for himself. It wasn't like fighting a man; it was like hurling himself among coils of iron.

("Comes of losing our temper, does it not?" asked the small, cold commentator; "we must never lose our temper.")

Now there was a sharp piston-rod of pain beating through him; and then that was all that there was; and just before there began to be nothing at all, he heard a far-away echo of Brooke's voice:

"I'm sorry, Gerlach—but you made it happen."

VI

HOWARD's and Harriette's paces had led them to the far end of the lower terrace. They stood beneath the plane tree; here was strung the last of the chain of lights that lit the garden after dark. It made a bright amber globe, with the shadowy wings of the night moths rising and falling about it.

Below the light, Harriette's head emerging from the high soft collar of fur was polished more than ever into the likeness of carven wood; it was black and gold; her face was tinted with the gold. Howard stared at the details of the momentary transformation; it diverted him from the tirade, from the voice that seemed to have been saying the same words for hours and hours:

"If Merritt Lodge doesn't get him out of the house . . . when Merritt Lodge comes down, you've got to tell him . . . you're going to tell Merritt Lodge just what Brooke was like when . . . I won't have a moment's peace until . . . and that girl how dare she . . . and in my view Merritt Lodge is just stalling on all this . . . and Merritt Lodge and Merritt Lodge and you're going to tell Merritt Lodge."

"Yes, darling."

One moth, larger than the rest, bobbed up for a second against the amber glow and there was the shadow of its wings on her forehead, like an ornament.

"Insulting me as though . . . wouldn't care if it were the President, I'm not going to have him . . . and that two-faced little son of a Merritt Lodge . . . and that girl . . ."

"Yes, darling."

Now they had turned and were pacing again; he held her arm and the arm felt rigid, unhelpful; the clack of her heels and the words went on.

From behind the house there came the noise of a car's engine starting up.

"Who's that?" Harriette asked quickly. "Who's going?"

"I don't know. Millie Bolton, I guess." He went back in his mind to the electric minute when the door had shut behind Merritt and Brooke; when he had expected the two women to burst into open quarrel. Like any other male similarly placed, he had made a movement towards the door; Millie had got there ahead of him, saying quietly, "If you'll excuse me, I have just a few more pages to type for Mr. Alder."

"It's late," he added, "and she must have finished work by now."

"Exactly like her to leave without a word, isn't it?" Harriette snapped. "Not as much as a thank you for her dinner."

"Maybe she didn't want to disturb us."

"*Why* are you always having to make excuses for them? That's what I'd like to know."

"Them?"

"Anybody who's against me."

"Oh, darling," he said despairingly.

"I'm going in now. And as soon as Merritt Lodge . . ."

He lost the rest of it. He followed Harriette slowly, by the steps to the upper terrace; she stood in the living-room, loosening her coat, looking upwards.

"Want to finish the game?" Howard asked, pausing by the Canasta table.

"No, thank you." She continued to stand there, looking upwards and listening.

"He's taking a long time," she said. "I wonder if there's anything he wants."

"Merritt? If there is, he'll ring."

"I loathe him."

"Yes, darling," Howard murmured. He sat down at the table and began to shuffle the cards. Harriette still kept her taut, listening pose. Silly, Howard thought—with the thickness of these walls and floors, what could she hope to

hear? He went on shuffling the cards. He took out the jokers and dealt the pack for solitaire.

"What a *time* he's taking," Harriette repeated. After a moment she picked up her embroidery and moved into her place in the corner of the sofa.

She had made him aware of the minutes passing. He could not keep his mind on the cards. He felt battered and apprehensive.

Down the hall a door opened. Harriette was up in the taut pose at once. The footsteps came to the living-room door and paused and Brooke Alder walked in.

"Hello; I thought you might still be in the garden. Merritt Lodge asked me to say goodbye to you for him."

"He's gone?" Harriette snapped.

"Yes; we'd finished our business," said Brooke.

There was a silence.

"Mind if I do some work now? Good night," said Brooke, smiling at them. He shut the door.

"He's won," Howard thought; not certain what the thought meant, conscious of it while Harriette clawed at his shoulder. "I don't believe it; Merritt Lodge wouldn't . . . You'll go right into the courtyard and see . . . leave the door open . . . I won't be left alone; not for a minute."

"It's true," Howard said, coming back. "His coat's gone; his car's gone and the corollary is that Dr. Lodge is no longer with us." He did not know why he should feel relieved.

Harriette's eyes were agonised. "And that horrible young woman is in the river-room with Brooke Alder?"

"I guess so, darling. Her car's sitting in the courtyard."

Even after twenty years of marriage, he found certain of Harriette's reactions unpredictable. Here was one now. "In that case," she said smoothly, "you and I are not staying around. Not for one more minute. We'll go to the Casino and I don't care if we're swept out with the cigarette-ends at three in the morning."

VII

It was after midnight when Millie Bolton came to the house again. She came as he had told her to come, walking down from the road; she walked under the black trees, over the noise of the waterfall, into the courtyard. She tapped on the window of the river-room. After a moment the front door opened and he stood there. He still looked as though all this were an elaborate joke and he would explain it in a minute.

"Done?" he asked.

"Yes. Here it is." She gave him the envelope.

"Bless you. I wish I hadn't had to ask you to do it. But it would have made for complications if I'd left the house just then. And you'd have had to face the Reys." He smiled down at her.

"Have they gone to bed?"

"No; they went out." He looked at the envelope in his hands. "No trouble, was there? About this?"

"None at all," said Millie. "There was a butler. He was a little stiff to begin with; but I explained that you and Dr. Lodge wanted the typescript and I gave him your card. He was very polite after that."

"Did he notice the car?"

"The car . . . I don't think so. It was outside the gate. May I ask you something, Mr. Alder?"

"Certainly."

"Why did you want me to take the doctor's car?"

"I'll tell you. We'll go to the river-room." He hesitated, "Where have you left it?"

"Where you said. On the track that goes up from the road; before you come to this one. Quite a nice wide place, I found, to park it."

Brooke nodded. They went down the corridor to the river-room. She supposed that she should feel tired, but she

was conscious only of a mounting excitement, a lively curiosity. The room no longer felt like the room in a dream. It was familiar and kind; the place where she wanted to be.

She glanced at Brooke, saw that he had halted beside the screen and put his hand to his forehead.

"Does your head still ache?"

"A little. I haven't been able to get back. Not since I had to plan . . . not since I talked to them. I've been getting the record in order. Look"—he pointed to the envelopes on the refectory table. "You'll see that the New York one is posted, won't you? And that Howard gets the other. Now that the third one's complete, I want you to have it." He was holding it out to her.

"Me?" said Millie Bolton.

"Yes. If you'd like it."

"You—you mean to keep?"

"Yes, of course I mean to keep."

She found to her astonishment that she was going to cry.

"What is the matter?" Brooke asked gently.

She shook her head; she could not speak. Mechanically she went to the table, picked up the last pages of the third copy and clipped them to the rest. The final phrase danced up at her through a swimming window of tears: "*Rather, it arouses compassion.*"

She heard her thin shaky voice. "I—just don't know what to say to you."

"You don't have to say anything. I have to say something to you."

She wiped her eyes.

"About the man in the mask," said Brooke.

She had forgotten Merritt Lodge. "There's his coat," Brooke said; she saw it lying over a chair. He hesitated.

"I hope that this won't frighten you."

"Nothing about you could ever frighten me."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure," she said to the eyes with the furrow between them.

"I'm glad. I'm not really a frightening person. All right, then. He's dead."

Her voice was no longer thin or shaky; it was asking evenly. "Did you kill him?"

"I may have. But I'm not sure. He tried to fight me and he was in no shape for fighting."

She thought about it. "He was dead already, when you came downstairs, when the Reys were in the garden."

"Yes."

"In your room."

"Yes. I locked the door on him and left him."

"And then you had to plan. I see. What did you tell the Reys?"

"Nothing. I said he'd gone." Brooke lapsed into silence. He went to the piano. He began to play the tune, very softly.

"Mr. Alder, what do you want me to do?"

He said, "You must go," and went on playing.

She sat still, with the envelope in her lap. There was nothing in her head now but the sound of the music.

Had he forgotten her yet—departed into his private kingdom? She could not tell. She waited.

VIII

MILLIE did not mean to sleep, but the sofa at the far end of the river-room was very large and very comfortable. Every time that she thought she had made the plan clear in her mind, she found that she was dreaming the plan and that the dream had embroidered it with an absurdity. They were escaping by boat; they were flying without wings; they were out of France and back in England, at Victoria Station and she was saying to Brooke, "You see how simple it was."

Once she awoke with her heart thumping because there was the noise of a car in the courtyard. She sat up in the dark, thinking, "They have come to fetch him." But it was only the Reys coming home. She heard Harriette's voice, Howard's voice, the slowed engine of the car as Howard ran it into the garage. She listened confidently to the sounds from another world; nothing to fear yet, nothing to fear from these two. She had driven her own car up to the track and left it beside Lodge's car. They would find nothing yet. She heard them go past the window, the two ignorant people, on their way to bed. She heard the front door open and no more after that; this room was too far away.

The dreams came back for a little while; not for long; she had prayed frantically to awake with the first signs of light; and now the long room was beginning to take shape; she could see to the end of it. She rose and stretched and felt as though she had not slept at all.

"In our room, where the night was ending and the half-tones hung," she thought.

She stood by the Knole settee, looking down at him.

He did not lie at full length. His back, shoulders and head were raised on the cushions. His arms were folded on his chest, his ankles crossed. He looked neat and awake. It was even possible in these shadows to think that his eyes were open.

He had lain like this, as quietly as this, from the moment when he had ceased to play the tune. The last words that he had said to her, the words "You must go", had not been revoked. "But I had to stay," she told him in her mind, "I couldn't leave you."

She made a helpless gesture with her hands towards the sleeping figure and tiptoed past it.

As soon as she had shut the door, she became alert, endangered. Now she was in enemy country, in the part of the house that did not belong to him.

First target in the enemy country was the telephone.

She would have cut it off last night if she had dared. She had taken the pliers out of the tool-kit in her car. The house bristled with telephones in varied colours. Above the green telephone in this hall there was a little switchboard panel with a switch that could point two ways. Millie turned on the light and saw that the switch pointed to the figure 2. This meant that the exchange was directly connected to Harriette's bedroom. Millie turned the switch to the figure 1. There was quite a simple, separate pleasure in doing this to Harriette Rey; in performing the action that severed her from her telephone-life, even at six in the morning when she was not, presumably, living it.

After a moment she decided that the change might be noticed. She put the switch back to the figure 2. With her pliers she went to work. She snipped the two telephone wires neatly and pushed the little betraying ends down between the panel and the wall. They stayed.

"That's that," said Millie to the mood that was beginning to creep over her; the practical mood of morning, telling her inexorably that nothing was any good. Nothing could save him, the mood said. The plan was useless; any plan was useless.

She tried not to hear. She turned off the light again, tiptoed along the hall in the dark until she found the door of the guests' lavatory. Here, with the assistance of Chanel soap and monogrammed towels she washed. The little glass cupboard above the basin held a bottle of toilet water, a mouth-wash, talcum powder and a jar of cream. Millie helped herself generously to all of them. She combed her hair; she used her powder-puff and her lipstick. When she was done, she saw that the face in the glass looked fragile and different with fatigue. It was a reflection that she had seen after nights of heavy bombing in London. Then, absurdly perhaps, it was something of which she could be proud. She had the same feeling now.

She went into the living-room. It was queer to be made free of the Reys' house, to be standing here turning up lights, looking at the Canasta table, at the bottles on the bar, at the romanticised youthful portrait of Howard Rey above the bar. She poured mineral water into a glass and drank it. She took a cigarette from one of the many boxes, lit the cigarette with an elaborate lighter. The cigarette tasted horrible; she put it out. It had made her feel dizzy; she sat down on the brown sofa with the yellow piping.

Here they came, the arguments of the practical mood; cold and calm and deadly:

"Give up. Now. It's no good. Be reasonable. In two hours the servants at Merritt Lodge's house will find out that he never came home. They'll know where he went. There's his car sitting on the track two hundred yards off the road. And upstairs, there's only a locked door hiding him."

She said, "All right. That's not all. Tell me I'm implicated. I lied my way into his house to get the script; I took his car and hid it. And I've been here since midnight knowing that Brooke Alder killed him. That's what they call accessory after the fact, isn't it?"

(The faint chatter of women's voices in a London office came to her: "Accessory after the fact. Millie. Just like Millie, isn't it, really? Yes, just like Millie.")

"Go on," Millie challenged the hectoring shape of commonsense. "Tell me what to do. You can tell me until you're blue in the face and I still won't do it."

"But what's your plan? To wake him? Force him into your silly little car and drive—where? That's your plan, isn't it? To get him away. How far could you get? Well, if you started now, I suppose you might do a hundred miles before they caught you. You can't smuggle Brooke Alder across frontiers like a pair of silk stockings or a Swiss watch, remember. He's mad. And he's a murderer. And he's finished from today."

"If he's finished, I want to be finished too. And I will be. That's my strength; that's the thing you don't understand. Whatever happens to him, happens to me."

"You know, you're not sane, Millie Bolton; any more than he is."

"I don't want to be."

"Childish, aren't you? Stop it now. Go straight upstairs and wake Howard Rey and tell him what's happened."

"I won't. This is the biggest thing in my whole life and I'll stay with it to the end."

"Would you mind telling me just why?"

"Because I can't help it."

But the mood went on arguing. It said, "Hide him, eh? Protect him? Get him where they'll never find him? *Brooke Alder*? You might as well try to hide Vesuvius under a tea-cosy."

And now she saw a distinct image of Vesuvius with a tea-cosy on the top. Her head nodded.

IX

HOWARD found the anticipation of the alarm-clock more effective than the clock itself. He had set it for eight. By half-past seven he was staring crossly at its luminous figures. "Fooled you," he thought, and sat up. His head ached; his body felt like somebody's else's; somebody who had the poor taste to choose a body dingily wrapped in hot wool, with small pains and prickles under the wool. He got out of bed.

"Women," he said to nobody in particular. "Scenes," he snarled through the cold spluttering torrents of the shower. "Three and a half hours' sleep. The hell with it; but better this way."

Wearily as he was, he could feel a certain satisfaction in

the moment. It was the satisfaction of having taken a situation into his own hands. This would not have happened, he thought, had Harriette won sixty *mille* at the Casino instead of losing it.

All the way home he had talked, reassuringly and soothingly, about anything but *chemin-de-fer*. It was his routine prescription and he had not observed its failure. Harriette had remained monosyllabic, unresponsive, but that was routine too. The scene had only begun inside the front door.

"Now, and I don't care how late it is, I'm going to call that little man and tell him what I think of him."

"What little man, for heaven's sake?"

"Howard Rey, you know perfectly well what little man."

"Darned if I do. The croupier? The *chef de parti*? The last guy who went banco against you and drew a nine."

She had said, among other words, "I mean I'm going to call Merritt Lodge."

"My God, you're not."

She had said, among other words, "Tell me why not."

"I will. It's a quarter to four. You're dead tired and you're just sore because you lost your shirt." He never spoke to her like that; perhaps he had been too weary not to speak to her like that. Having begun, he could not stop:

"I've had quite enough from you tonight, darling. Sorry. But I'm not taking any more. And I'm not letting you make an ass of yourself by screaming at anybody down the telephone at four a.m. No, Harriette. You'll listen to me, please, for a change. You'll come to bed, you'll take your sleeping-pills—and one extra—and you'll sleep till noon.

"I'll call Merritt myself. When? First thing in the morning. Yes, I will. Tell him? Tell him I won't have my wife turned into a nervous wreck, for one thing. Tell him I'm tired of standing around while you and he spy on Brooke Alder and then spit at each other like cats and make fools of yourselves in front of Millie Bolton. Tell him anything I

damn please. But you'll come to bed now. One word more and I'll pick you up and carry you."

The crumpling of Harriette had been the surprise. It was still surprising him now. He saw the unusual picture of himself putting her to bed, measuring out the dose of sleeping-pills, snapping off her light and striding away.

"Well, it worked," said Howard sleepily. "And in future I'll do a little more of it; no, a lot more of it."

He leaned at the window. He saw wide flats of blue sky; the last clouds narrowing and retreating over the hills. The valley was renewed in the clearest shapes and colours of daylight. He looked at the pink walled town on its crest, at the rising slopes behind it, where the mimosa was golden. It was a beautiful morning.

He finished dressing and went downstairs; he wanted coffee. There was nobody in the kitchen yet. "And at eight o'clock, that's a disgrace," said Howard. He put the coffee on the stove. He went back to the hall to telephone. As he picked up the telephone, the door of the living-room opened. Millie Bolton stood there, blinking like an owl and looking very pale.

"Oh, Mr. Rey. I must have, I didn't mean—"

"Good morning," he said, "what are you doing around at this hour? Half a minute; I just have to put a call through."

"But, Mr. Rey . . ." She seemed petrified. The exchange took a long time to answer. "Just calling Dr. Lodge," he said, "or trying to."

"Please don't do that."

"I beg your pardon."

"I said please don't do that."

"Don't call Dr. Lodge?"

"No."

"Why the devil not?" It was rude, but he was still sleepy and Millie had suddenly ranged herself in his mind under the heading "Women". She was just another woman telling him not to do something.

She said, "Because there's no need. Dr. Lodge gave me a message for you." She looked agitated.

"Oh, he did? When?" said Howard, still holding the telephone.

"Last night. I should have given it to you last night."

"And why didn't you?"

She said, "I suppose I just forgot. I was finishing my typing in the river-room and then you and Mrs. Rey went out."

It was a queerly unconvincing statement. Howard said, "We had a message. Brooke Alder gave it to us—just to say good night."

"I know," said Millie. "But I saw Dr. Lodge after Mr. Alder did. For a minute. He was leaving and—he knew you were in the garden. He thought perhaps . . ."

"What is all this?" Howard asked patiently.

"Dr. Lodge said would you please come to his house this morning. You and Mrs. Rey. That you could talk more easily there than here. As early as you liked, he said. Half-past nine."

Howard shook the telephone, put it back, picked it up again.

"I meant to write the message down, so's you'd find it when you came in," said Millie, sounding a little more self-possessed.

"And why didn't you do that?"

"I forgot."

He was caught between two exasperations. It was easier to damn the telephone aloud than to damn Millie Bolton.

"There's really no need to call Dr. Lodge. He said he'd be in all the morning."

Howard abandoned the telephone. He stood looking her up and down. "Just what *are* you doing here, Millie? It's a hell of a time to start work. On a Sunday too."

"I—I haven't been home."

That shook him. "Not at all? You've been here all night?"

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"Yes. You see, Mr. Alder gave me a lot of dictation. Then he went to bed. And I stayed down in the river-room to finish it. I took a little nap afterwards. I hope you don't mind."

It was the oddest lie. He was momentarily saved from comment by the arrival of Serge. "Try and get down a little earlier in future, will you?" Howard said. "That coffee ought to be ready. You'd like a cup, wouldn't you, Millie?" He turned back to her. She looked as though she were going to faint.

"Now," he said, "what's the point of telling me you stayed here all night?"

"I did."

"No, I'm sorry; you didn't. You're acting very oddly, anyway. But that's just a flat lie. You weren't here when I got home, around three."

"Yes, I was."

"But I know you weren't. Your car was gone."

Watching the still, expressionless face, he thought, "I've known a lot of people who pretended they hadn't slept out when they had. But this is the first time I ever met one who pretended she had when she hadn't."

"Millie," he said, "your car was in the courtyard when we left. It wasn't when we came back. And it wasn't in the garage. If you were here all night, what happened to it?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know where your car is?"

"No, Mr. Rey."

A bright pink flush had changed the pale face; her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh my God," Howard thought, "another of them crying."

"Oh, *please*, Mr. Rey——" she began; there was a note of hysteria in her voice.

"Stop it," said Howard. "Stop it now. I've not the remotest idea what any of this is about, but I do know I've

had enough scenes and sobs to last me through my next reincarnation."

She was silent.

"That's still your story, is it? That you stayed all night here and lost your car and that Merritt Lodge wants to see us at half-past nine?"

She nodded.

"O.K. I don't believe a word of it, I'm afraid, but it's easy to check. If Lodge can see me at nine-thirty, he can see me now. As soon as I've had my coffee. All right, Serge; take the tray into the dining-room for Miss Bolton. I'll drink mine here." He picked up the telephone again. There was still no answer. He swallowed the coffee and it burned his throat. He looked in round the dining-room door.

"I'm going now, Millie."

"Yes, Mr. Rey."

"I've tried to get through to let him know, but the telephone's not working."

"Yes, Mr. Rey. She was entirely composed now. He expected her to ask him not to go, to admit that she had made up the message, to break down and give him some key to this singularly stupid mystery. When she did not, he said, "Good-bye. You know where I am if I'm wanted. And nobody is to disturb Mrs. Rey."

He went out into the courtyard.

He paused, looking back at the house. In the morning sunlight, its proportions pleased him suddenly. He had made it, and that for a moment was more important than anything that had happened in the house.

As he drove across the bridge, he could feel that a change had taken place, in himself and in his life. He could not give it a name. All that he could see now was that he was a man in search of a clue. He drove on, towards the clue.

X

MILLIE BOLTON heard Howard drive off. Everything went slowly now; the car's engine roaring and purring in the courtyard, her fingers tapping the table, her heart making a quiet, measured noise against her ribs.

"He's won," she thought. "They've won. I've failed." She was only Millie Bolton after all; not made for inspiration or adventure. She had gone a certain way with both. And she had let them slip; she had wasted nearly two hours—two hours that might have saved Brooke Alder—by going to sleep on the living-room sofa. It was too stupidly awful to have happened; and it had happened. Worse, she had broken down at the moment of challenge, she had bumbled an impossible mixture of facts and lies and she had sent Howard straight to the one place where he would find out the truth.

"But it was the only thing I could think of. I was so afraid he'd go on trying to telephone. Oh, it can't be my fault; not *all* my fault. How could I know he'd get up so early? I couldn't. But I should have thought of it; provided for it; had a story ready; not lost my head. Only silly little people lose their heads."

She was a silly little person. She knew it now. She said to herself, "I must go to him; wake him; tell him. He's got half an hour. It's his one chance. It's all that's left."

She came to the door of the river-room. She did not knock. She thought that she would find the dark still here, the curtains drawn at the high windows, the long, enchanted gallery still set in the night's frame.

The curtains were drawn back. The sunlight poured upon the room. It was a room of intimidating majesty; not the kind, familiar place where she had watched with him. The tall gold shape of the carved angel shone, remote and blind, with rigid wings. Sunlight dusted the tapestries, watered

the creamy surface of the black chairs, sharpened each angle and colour and shape. The room stretched away from her, an aisle of unfamiliar beauty, hung with beams of moted light, as far as the dais. It was a private gallery, a place august and new; a place where she was not wanted. She stood by the door, not daring to move towards him.

He was pacing quietly, with long strides, from end to end of the room. She watched him coming to the three steps that led on to the dais, halting there and striding back. She saw that his hair was combed, that his clothes were neat and uncrumpled; he did not look in the least as though he had slept here all night. He was whistling softly, a phrase of the island tune.

For the first time she was afraid of him. His face was the face that she had seen in newspaper photographs; the statesman's face, set and preoccupied.

He stood still for a moment beside the refectory table, laid his hand on it, looked back towards the dais. He had stopped whistling. He leaned his head a little to one side.

"Hear them?" he said. "The feet overhead. They're coming in."

She was stricken; trying to get the words out, the words that would tell him how badly she had failed. She heard her voice saying, "We must go now. It's all I can think of. Walk up to my car and go. We've got half an hour."

He said gently, "Half an hour? Oh, less than that. You'll hear the chime of the bell in a very few minutes."

"The bell?"

"The bronze bell," Brooke said. "They only strike it for the Trial, you know."

The cleft between his eyebrows deepened as he stared at her; he looked as though he were trying to remember who she was.

Then she saw that her failure did not count; that even if she had watched with him until now, she could have done nothing.

"Don't be afraid," said Brooke. "You mustn't be afraid. The island can't lose."

The sob that came up in her throat was strident and ugly; a horrible, small sound that she could not help.

Still he looked at her musingly. "Nor be sad; remember that."

"I'll remember," said Millie.

He turned and walked as far as the dais. He stood at the foot of the three steps; he called back over his shoulder, "Stand here with me."

She came to his side. He was not looking at her now, but he knew that she was there. "When it sounds——" he began; "But you know it all. You're part of it now."

"Am I?"

He did not answer. She saw his profile lifted and looking towards the archway door.

"There," he said. "Hear it? The first stroke." Slowly he mounted the steps.

"Do you—do you want me to go?"

"Yes; you must leave me, please."

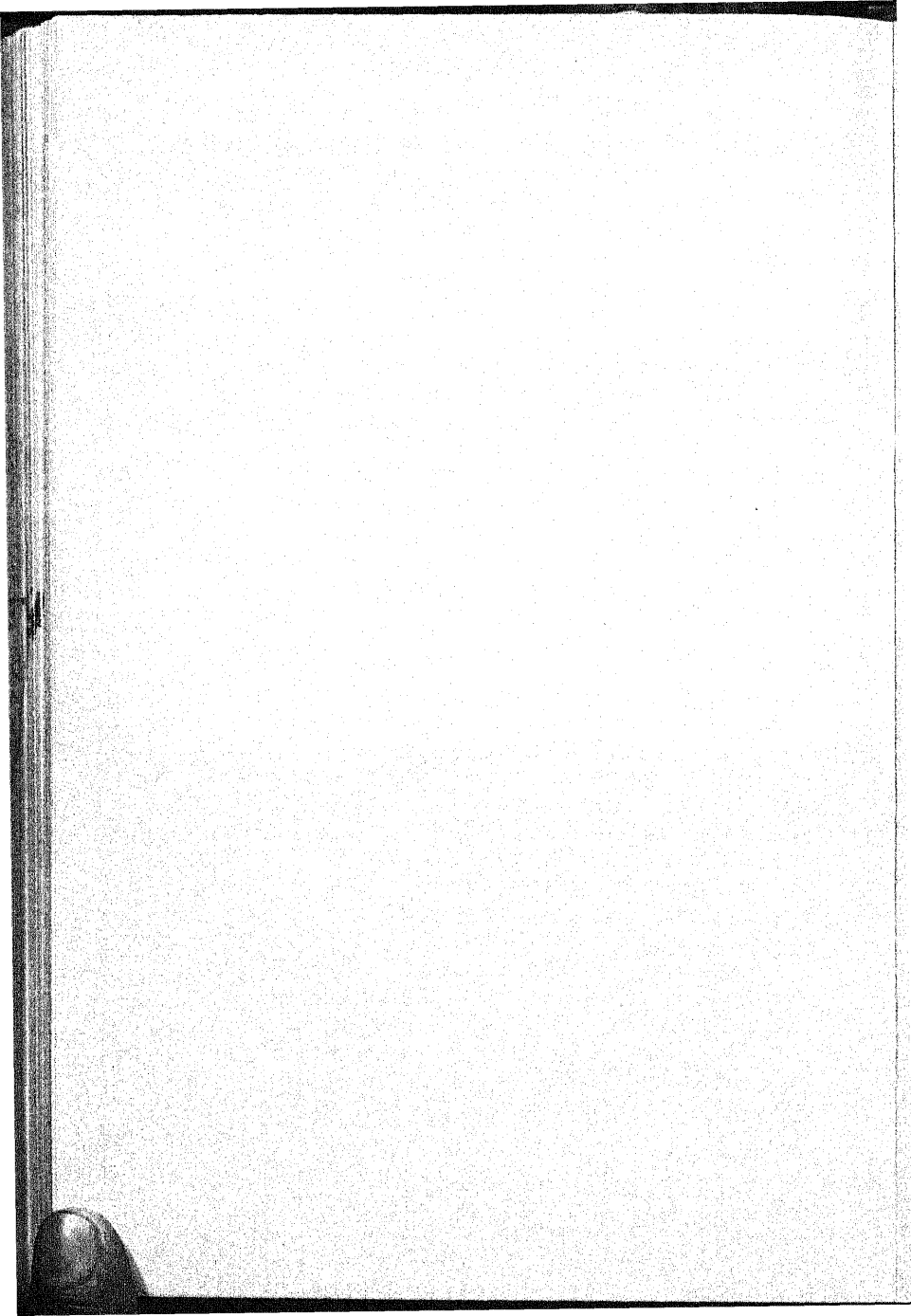
She did not look back. She went out, across the courtyard, on to the bridge above the river. She stood there, waiting. It was a vigil that must end soon. It would end with the noise of a car on the road above; Howard Rey's car; and perhaps another. (Men with strangers' faces; detectives in plain clothes; men from the Consulate; doctors?) She could not think who would come, nor what they would do, but it would be for her to meet them.

She would not look at the house. She had the absurd feeling that if she did not look at it, she could make it not be there; that she could change the reality of wall and courtyard behind her left shoulder into a marble arena; with the fragile shafts of pillars rising against the sky. She could make the hum of a great crowd be there, rising above the tiers of benches. She could make the Council sit in white robes to hear the fate of Leron. But she must not look back.

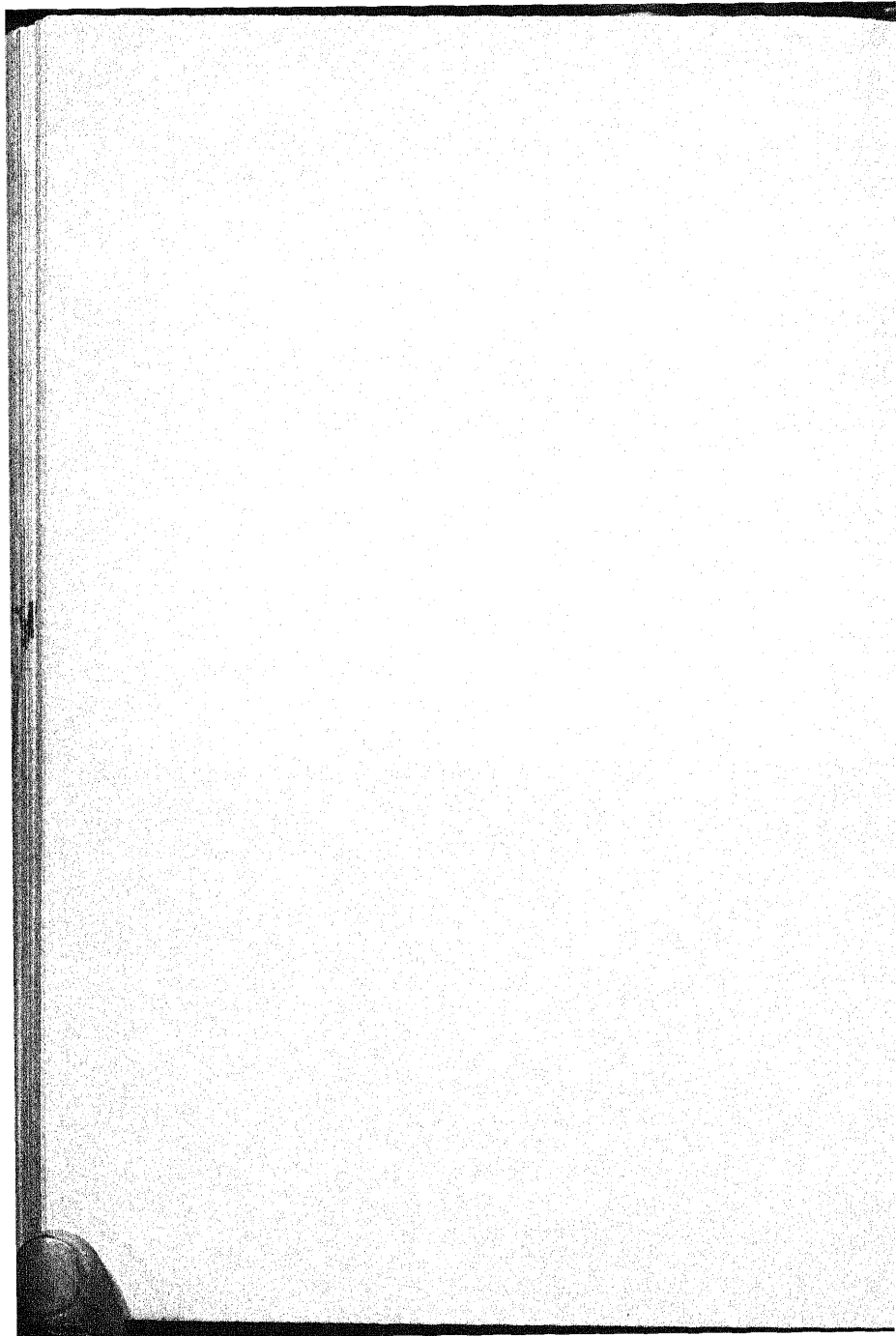
She stared down into the river, at the clattering sun-shot water that tumbled and laced and cascaded out of sight. The sun striking through the leaves seemed as noisy as the water. She said the words in her mind over and over; until they were singing in the noise of the water and mixed in the pattern made by the sun.

"You're part of it now."

"Part of it now. I've got that for ever. Nobody can take one moment of all this away; no matter what they do to me. It's happened. It's mine. And only mine. I was with him; nobody else. I saw it; I shared it; he gave it to me. It will be with me all my life. Nothing can hurt or change it. It's safe. Thank you," she said to the God whose image wore, ineffaceably, a furrow between the brows and a wide gay smile, "thank you for letting me feel I'd rather be me than anybody in the world. And let them be gentle with him, and don't let him suffer or know. Amen," she added primly, and went on staring at the river.



THE ISLAND



I

He had forgotten his name. This did not trouble him, because all that he saw was familiar; exactly what the person who was, for the moment, without identity had expected to see.

The Forum was empty. In the light of early morning it had a pale, watered look. The benches made half-circles of blue shadow, with the aisles cutting them like four pale rays that slanted up from the floor. He saw the dais at the head of the Forum; the Court Advocate's bench in the centre of the dais, with the stone pulpit, the witness-stand, before it and the Council benches on its right. At the back of the dais, there was the bronze door that would open when the bronze bell sounded.

He supposed that he must be standing between the pillars on the rim, yet he did not feel enough aware of his body to be certain. His mind asked no questions; he was content to look down into the waiting, empty theatre, the marble pool of watered light and blue shadow. Here, where all was to happen, nothing happened yet.

Looking up and looking south, he saw the city; dimly outlined through the mists of morning, with Memorial Hill clear of the mist. The sun touched the Senate's dome and the tawny walls of the palace.

"Look north," his mind told him, "and you will see the mountain peak." Obediently he turned, conscious now of possessing a body, though a body as yet oddly light and impalpable. There was the snow-summit, carried on cloud, shining half-way up the sky. Below the clouds he saw the blue green hills in the order that he had always known.

For a long moment he waited, feeling his way back to a state of things as enduring as those hills were. This was like the slow awakening from a dream; the sharp atmosphere of

the dream hung about him and haunted him, though he could recall no detail except the sound of a voice that pleaded. Somewhere the voice still spoke, but it was growing fainter.

He looked down again into the Forum, aware of a noise like a tide. The descending tiers that had been quiet half-circles of shadow were packed with heads and shoulders. The tide was the voice of the crowd. Up on the rim (but he was not among them) there were men and women standing between the pillars, a frieze of human figures on blue sky. Down on the dais the Court Advocate was seated; his scarlet robe painted its bright shape against the frame of the door behind him. Only the Council benches and the witness-stand were empty now, and the floor, a lake of flat marble whose shores were the crowd.

He looked again at the door behind the dais; the door had panels of carved bronze; he knew it well; he had stared at the carving of those panels many times, from his seat on the Council bench.

There was a movement like the click of a camera's shutter somewhere between the front of his brain and his eyes. It is the focus of the present, he thought, the focus of Now. He saw that he was still looking at the door but differently; from the other side. And then the Guardian remembered where he was. He was waiting in the ante-room for the bronze bell to sound. His fingers adjusted the clasp at his neck, the clasp that held the white Council robe.

"But the scene outside? Why did I see it so clearly? It is only the scene imagined. I have not looked upon it yet."

Very faintly, the voice of the dream persisted, as though the dream were still going on without him. In the dream he was telling somebody not to be afraid; to wait with him for the chime of the bell.

Who was the person in the dream?

The attendant beside him, perhaps; who now straightened the folds of the robe, withdrew a little way and stood

listening, as he did. It was natural, the Guardian thought, that his dreams should have concerned themselves so vividly with the look of the Forum at dawn, with this actual moment in this room. He had also, he fancied, dreamed the note of the bell chiming.

He glanced over his shoulder. The ante-room was divided by three steps leading down from the place where he stood, to the main body of the room where the eight members of the Council were robed and waiting. He could see Peter looking thunderous, Dalzano's profile delicately doubtful; Tribe's blankness gave an impression of confidence. Bernard had found something to laugh at with Michaelis. Scansen and Pendean were talking quietly, the narrow red head and the broad bullock head bent together. Valdes stood a little apart from the rest, still as a statue.

So we have come to the last minutes, he thought, and then we are met to decide the island's destiny. He tried to see the moment ahead in its full size and full implication. It was the moment to clear all irrelevances from the problem, to be sure of it and state it. They were to ask for a verdict on Leron; they themselves were to be tried, weighed in the balance, judged and sentenced. To life or to death?

He thought, standing there alone, that he knew. It was not a matter of deciding whether life on Leron "worked"; or whether the world's way "worked" more satisfactorily for the human need. It was a matter of looking at the aim; the aim that was Leron's, in comparison with the aim that was the world's. All detail must go down before this; no reform, no change of law, no punishment upon the rebels, no future plan had true significance beside it. In the course of Trial they would hear all those things debated, speak of those things; but they were so much incidental flesh upon the issue; the islanders must look at the skeleton, at the bones. The aim of one; the aim of the other. It was not that the world's aim was wrong; nor would he say this; it was

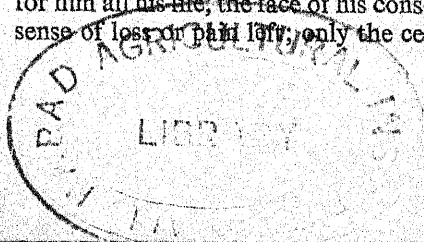
merely unidentifiable. The world was confused by centuries of materialism, just as the world of the First Civilisation had confused itself. Leron's aim was clear; still the purpose set down in the Charter by the first men: "To live free for the love of living free, to make for the love of making, to work for the sake of work and the sake of the island, to continue in dedication and agreement all our lives, to the glory of God."

He repeated the words inside his head and saw the pattern that they made; and with it the flaw in the pattern that must come inevitably so long as man remained man, victim of human weakness. They had failed, he thought, in the sense that man must always fail. But who would vote the end of the island as a remedy? That answer was the answer of the suicide. No, he said. He stared at the door again, as though he tried to look through it to the benches, to the corporate shape of justice, to the people of Leron, and get their "No" before the question was put to them: "No; the island will choose to live, not to die."

There was the first stroke of the bell; it came with the impact of the thing expected so long that its coming brought disbelief. He had to glance back down the room to make sure that it was sounding, that the Council too had heard it. Yes; the eight white robes moved forward and he turned to lead them.

The bronze door slid back. As he stepped on to the dais, he heard the great sighing rustle of the crowd that rose to its feet; saw, looking upward, the figures on the rim all straightened and standing still.

He took his place. The familiar profile of Peter was on his left now; the gleaming imperial head and the wide shoulders. Peter grinned at him, then looked away across the Forum. At his right, Valdes sat with her hands linked on her knee. And the face of Valdes was what it had been for him all his life, the face of his consolation. There was no sense of loss or pain left; only the certainty that they were



together, that neither she nor he was any longer alone. They looked at the issue with the same steadiness of eye; they saw it in perspective; they saw the bones. They saw the island first, and their own selves, their own sins, their own punishments afterwards. In this companionship he was content.

Some of the light and the laughter had gone from her for ever. His own assurance, the arrogant, solitary self, would not return. These were casualties made by truth. The survivors, he thought, were better fitted for the battle ahead.

Deliberately, he stared across the Forum to the place where Julian sat, with the soldiers of the Legion surrounding him. Julian kept a pose that was lazily graceful, one arm laid along the back of the bench. At last he looked like the Claimant, the dark, impudent threat to Leron. "And still," the Guardian thought, "I do not hate him. Simply I see that he is there, a punctuation point in Leron's history. He has become more of a fact than a person. It is a small fact. And though he gives himself the appearance of taking things easily, he knows his own stature. He does not lift his eyes."

His own eyes looked past Julian; on and upwards above the soldiers, to the little rank of Julian's friends, Amyas and the rest. He could not hate these people, either; they too were merely a point in time. He forgot them as his eyes moved on, past the men of the Senate, to find faces that they knew: his sister's face and the bearded face of Rydal the artist; the dreaming profile of the poet Merlin. "The makers of Leron are its strength," he thought, "and we have few destroyers. Julian himself is not a destroyer, but the tool of intending destruction," and thinking so, he remembered that Gerlach was dead; that news of his death had come last night. There was relief in the thought.

The last stroke of the bronze bell echoed into silence. The sun was strong now; as the Court Advocate rose, his

figure cast a sharp shadow before him on the dais; a shadow that slanted to the foot of the stone pulpit.

He was reading the Final Proclamation. The Guardian heard the words without hearing them. His eyes went on seeking across the crowd-faces; "We have other makers than the artists," he thought. He saw the tanned faces of the farmers and fishermen; the straw-blond heads and white-frilled caps from the North-East; a group of stone-workers from the quarries south of the Capital. He saw the men from the Mine; and the Mine and the Lake no longer seemed the source of fear, but the source of a miracle. He thought of Orrey who, because he had never trusted himself, had never trusted the island. It was as though Orrey had acted a part for him, exposed a flaw in his own thinking so that Orrey's madness left him now more wise.

Faces, with the sun on them, stretching away illimitably; words of the Court Advocate, falling past his ears. He saw the whole crowd fabric, bright and vigorous and lusty, the island fabric, woven strong. More soldiers of the Legion; here they surrounded the boys of the New Guard, the misguided boys who had loved Leron too much; and beyond them, their enemies, the strayed gang from Tropic Side.

He looked upwards, to the rim. Those were the students standing there, he remembered; the students had the places between the pillars. Youth was here, innocent in promise as in disgrace.

He thought of the island itself; of shore and mountain, field and road and waterway. Bright landscapes and changing seas came up into memory, held their focus for an instant, then slid past his eyes. The long waves on South-West Beach; the still, dark trees above North Landing; the flat green marshes to the East; the river moating the Capital and the bearskin glacier on the face of White Wall.

He sniffed the smells of the island; the flower on Tropic Side; the sulphurous reek at the Mine; the mixture of leaves and smoke and sea that scented his own garden. After the

scents there came the tunes; the island tunes with the power of music remembered, bringing lost time back. And then the Court Advocate's words:

"You will hear the Guardian of the Law."

As he rose, he caught the fleeting, slanted smile that Valdes gave to him and this was all that he took with him, walking to the stone stand. He faced the Forum.

He would not have thought that so many could be so still. Their stillness satisfied him; it was like the stillness in his own mind; a calm unshakable by the thought of defeat or the belief in victory.

He knew that he had changed since last he stood here. Last time had been for his farewell to the Senate, before he went on the world journey. A long time ago: "When I was still under the illusion that it was I who made Leron possible; now I see that it is Leron that makes me possible; that the Guardian's word is only the word of the island. I have become," he thought, "the reed through which the island music blows; an interpreter rather than a maker.

"My knowledge of these people is different today. As though, where once I used to observe and hear them, I have lived in their hearts. Yes, I have been them," he said to himself, "all of them. It is this that gives me the instructed quality of the reed. The sense of purpose that I feel now is no longer my own, nor has to be. It is the purpose of Leron."

He heard his voice.